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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
ST. MATTHEW

CHAPTERS IX. TO XVII.

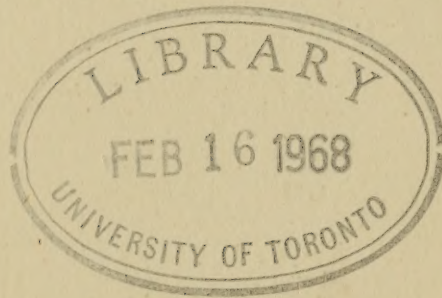
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CHRIST'S ENCOURAGEMENTS

'Son, be of good cheer.'—MATT. ix. 2.

THIS word of encouragement, which exhorts to both cheerfulness and courage, is often upon Christ's lips. It is only once employed in the Gospels by any other than He. If we throw together the various instances in which He thus speaks, we may get a somewhat striking view of the hindrances to such a temper of bold, buoyant cheerfulness which the world presents, and of the means for securing it which Christ provides.

But before I consider these individually, let me point you to this thought, that such a disposition, facing the inevitable sorrows, evils, and toilsome tasks of life with glad and courageous buoyancy, is a Christian duty, and is a temper not merely to be longed for, but consciously and definitely to be striven after.

We have a great deal more in our power, in the regulation of moods and tempers and dispositions, than we often are willing to acknowledge to ourselves. Our 'low' times—when we fret and are dull, and all things seem wrapped in gloom, and we are ready to sit down and bewail ourselves, like Job on his dunghill—are often quite as much the results of our own imperfect Christianity as the response of our feelings to external circumstances. It is by no means an unnecessary reminder for us, who have heavy tasks set us, which often seem too heavy, and are surrounded, as

we all are, with crowding temptations to be bitter and melancholy and sad, that Christ commands us to be, and therefore we ought to be, 'of good cheer.'

Another observation may be made as preliminary, and that is that Jesus Christ never tells people to cheer up without giving them reason to do so. We shall see presently that in all cases where the words occur they are immediately followed by words or deeds of His which hold forth something on which, if the hearer's faith lay hold, darkness and gloom will fly like morning mists before the rising sun. The world comes to us and says, in the midst of our sorrows and our difficulties, 'Be of good cheer,' and says it in vain, and generally only rubs salt into the sore by saying it. Jesus Christ never thus vainly preaches the duty of encouraging ourselves without giving us ample reasons for the cheerfulness which He enjoins.

With these two remarks to begin with--that we ought to make it a part of our Christian discipline of ourselves to seek to cultivate a continuous and equable temperament of calm, courageous good cheer; and that Jesus Christ never commands such a temper without showing cause for our obedience--let us turn for a few moments to the various instances in which this expression falls from His lips.

I. Now the first of them is this of my text, and from it we learn this truth, that Christ's first contribution to our temper of equable, courageous cheerfulness is the assurance that all our sins are forgiven.

'Son, be of good cheer,' said He to that poor palsied sufferer lying there upon the little light bed in front of Him. He had been brought to Christ to be cured of his palsy. Our Lord seems to offer him a very irrelevant blessing when, instead of the healing of his

limbs, He offers him the forgiveness of his sins. That was possibly not what he wanted most, certainly it was not what the friends who had brought him wanted for him, but Jesus knew better than they what the man suffered most from and most needed to have cured. They would have said 'Palsy.' He said, 'Yes! but palsy that comes from sin.' For, no doubt, the sick man's disease was 'a sin of flesh avenged in kind,' and so Christ went to the fountain-head when He said, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' He therein implied, not only that the man was longing for something more than his four kindly but ignorant bearers there knew, but also that the root of his disease was extirpated when his sins were forgiven.

And so, in like manner, 'thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.' There is nothing that so drapes a soul with darkness as either the consciousness of unforgiven sin or the want of consciousness of forgiven sin. There may be plenty of superficial cheerfulness. I know that; and I know what the bitter wise man called it, 'the crackling of thorns under the pot,' which, the more they crackle, the faster they turn into powdery ash and lose all their warmth. For stable, deep, lifelong, reliable courage and cheerfulness, there must be thorough work made with the black spot in the heart, and the black lines in the history. And unless our comforters can come to us and say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' they are only chattering nonsense, and singing songs to a heavy heart which will make an effervescence 'like vinegar on nitre,' when they say to us, 'Be of good cheer.' How can I be glad if there lie coiled in my heart that consciousness of alienation and disorder in my relations to God, which all men carry with them, though they

overlay it and try to forget it? There is no basis for a peaceful gladness worthy of a man except that which digs deep down into the very secrets of the heart, and lays the first course of the building in the consciousness of pardoned sin. 'Son, be of good cheer!' Lift up thy head. Face smaller evils without discomposure, and with quietly throbbing pulses, for the fountain of possible terrors and calamities is stanchèd and stayed with, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee.'

Side by side with this first instance, illustrating the same general thought, though from a somewhat different point of view, I may put another of the instances in which the same phrase was soothingly on our Lord's lips. 'Daughter,' said He to the poor woman with the issue of blood, 'be of good cheer. Thy faith hath saved thee.' The consciousness of a living union with God through Christ by faith, which results in the present possession of a real, though it may be a partial, salvation, is indispensable to the temper of equable cheerfulness of which I have been speaking. Apart from that consciousness, you may have plenty of excitement, but no lasting calm. The contrast between the drugged and effervescent potion which the world gives as a cup of gladness, and the pure tonic which Jesus Christ administers for the same purpose, is infinite. He says to us, 'I forgive thy sins; by thy faith I save thee; go in peace.' Then the burdened heart is freed from its oppression, and the downcast face is lifted up, and all things around change, as when the sunshine comes out on the wintry landscape, and the very snow sparkles into diamonds. So much, then, for the first of the instances of the use of this phrase.

II. We now take a second. Jesus Christ ministers

to us cheerful courage because He manifests Himself to us as a Companion in the storm (Matt. xiv. 27).

The narrative is very familiar to us, so that I need not enlarge upon it. You remember the scene—our Lord alone on the mountain in prayer, the darkness coming down upon the little boat, the storm rising as the darkness fell, the wind howling down the gorges of the mountains round the landlocked lake, the crew 'toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary.' And then, all at once, out of the mysterious obscurity beneath the shadow of the hills, Something is seen moving, and it comes nearer; and the waves become solid beneath that light and noiseless foot, as steadily nearer He comes. Jesus Christ uses the billows as the pavement over which He approaches His servants, and the storms which beat on us are His occasion for drawing very near. Then they think Him a spirit, and cry out with voices that were heard amidst the howling of the tempest, and struck upon the ear of whomsoever told the Evangelist the story. They cry out with a shriek of terror—because Jesus Christ is coming to them in so strange a fashion! Have *we* never shrieked and groaned, and passionately wept aloud for the same reason; and mistaken the Lord of love and consolation for some grisly spectre? When He comes it is with the old word on His lips, 'Be of good cheer.'

'Tell us not to be frightened when we see something stalking across the waves in the darkness!' 'It is I'; surely that is enough. The Companion in the storm is the Calmer of the terror. He who recognises Jesus Christ as drawing near to his heart over wild billows may well 'be of good cheer,' since the storm but brings his truest treasure to him.

‘ Well roars the storm to those who hear
A deeper Voice across the storm.’

And He who, with unwetted foot, can tread on the wave, and with quiet voice heard above the shriek of the blast can say, ‘It is I,’ has the right to say, ‘Be of good cheer,’ and never says it in vain to such as take Him into their lives however tempest-tossed, and into their hearts however tremulous.

III. A third instance of the occurrence of this word of cheer presents Jesus as ministering cheerful courage to us by reason of His being victor in the strife with the world (John xvi. 33).

‘In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.’

Of course ‘the world’ which He overcame is the whole aggregate of things and persons considered as separated from God, and as being the great Antagonist and counter power to a holy life of obedience and filial devotion. At that last moment when, according to all outward seeming and the estimate of things which sense would make, He was utterly and hopelessly and all but ignominiously beaten, He says, ‘I have overcome the world.’ What! Thou! within four-and-twenty hours of Thy Cross? Is that victory? Yes! For he conquers the world who uses all its opposition as well as its real good to help him, absolutely and utterly, to do the will of God. And he is conquered by the world who lets it, by its glozing sweetnesss and flatteries, or by its knitted brows and frowning eyes and threatening hand, hinder him from the path of perfect consecration and entire conformity to the Father’s will.

Christ has conquered. What does that matter to us? Why, it matters this, that we may have the

Spirit of Jesus Christ in our hearts to make us also victorious in the same fight. And whosoever will lay his weakness on that strong arm, and open his emptiness to receive the fulness of that victorious Spirit for the very spirit of his life, will be 'more than conqueror through Him that loved us,' and can front all the evils, dangers, threatenings, temptations of the world, its heaped sweets and its frowning antagonisms, with the calm confidence that none of them are able to daunt him; and that the Victor Lord will cover his head in the day of battle and deliver him from every evil work. 'Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world, and play your parts like men in the good fight of faith; for I am at your back, and will help you with Mine own strength.'

IV. The last instance that I point to of the use of this phrase is one in which it was spoken by Christ's voice from heaven (Acts xxiii. 11). It was the voice which was heard by the Apostle Paul after he had been almost torn in pieces by the crowd in the Temple, and had been bestowed for security, by the half-contemptuous protection of the Roman governor, in the castle, and was looking onward into a very doubtful future, not knowing how many hours' purchase his life might be worth. That same night the Lord appeared to him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.' That is to say, 'No man can touch you until I let him, and nobody shall touch you until you have done your work and spoken out your testimony. Jerusalem is a little sphere; Rome is a great one. The tools to the hand that can use them. The reward for work is more work, and work in a larger sphere. So cheer up! for I have much for you to do yet.'

And the spirit of that encouragement may go with us all, breeding in us the quiet confidence that no matter who may thwart or hinder, no matter what dangers or evils may seem to ring us round, the Master who bids us 'Be of good cheer' will give us a charmed life, and nothing shall by any means hurt us until He says to us, 'Be of good courage; for you have done your work; and now come and rest.' 'Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.'

SOUL-HEALING FIRST: BODY-HEALING SECOND

'That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.'—MATT. ix. 6.

THE great example of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is followed, in this and the preceding chapter, by a similar collection of His works of healing. These are divided into three groups, each consisting of three members. This miracle is the last of the second triad, of which the other two members are the miraculous stilling of the tempest and the casting out of the demons from the men in the country of the Gergesenes.

One may discern a certain analogy in these three members of this central group. In all of them our Lord appears as the peace-bringer. But the spheres are different. The calm which was breathed over the stormy lake is peace of a lower kind than that which filled the soul of the demoniacs when the power that made discord within had been cast out. Even that peace was lower in kind than that which brought sweet

repose in the assurance of pardon to this poor paralytic. Forgiveness speaks of a loftier blessing than even the casting out of demons. The manifestation of power and love steadily rises to a climax.

The most important part of this story, then, is not the mere healing of the disease, but the forgiveness of sins which accompanies it. And the large teaching which our Lord gives as to the relation between His miracles and His standing work, His ordinary work which He has been doing all through the ages, which He is doing to-day, which He is ready to do for you and me if we will let Him, towers high above the mere miracle, which is honoured by being the signal attestation of that work.

Therefore I would turn to this story now, not for the sake of dealing with the mere miraculous event, but in order to draw the important lessons from it which lie upon its very surface.

I. The first thought that is suggested here is that our deepest need is forgiveness.

How strangely irrelevant and beside the mark, at first sight, seems the answer which Christ gives to the eager zeal and earnestness of the man and his bearers. Christ's word is 'Son,' or as the original might more literally and even more tenderly be rendered, 'Child—be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.' That seemed far away from their want. It *was* far from their wish, but yet it was the shortest road to its accomplishment. Christ here goes straight to the heart of the necessity, when, passing by the disease for the moment, He speaks the great word of pardon. The palsy was probably the result of the sufferer's vice, and probably, too, he felt, whatever may have been his friends' wishes for him, that he needed for-

givenness most. Such a conclusion as to his state of mind seems a fair inference from our Lord's words to him, for Christ would never have offered forgiveness to an impenitent or indifferent heart.

So we may learn that our chief and prime need is forgiveness. Amid all our clamours and hungry needs, that is our deepest. Is not a man's chief relation in this world his relation to God? Is not that the most important thing about all of us? If that be wrong, will not everything be wrong? If that be right, will not everything come right? And is it not true that for you and me, and for all our fellows, whatever be the surface diversities of character, civilisation, culture, taste and the like, there is one deep experience common to every human spirit, and that is the fact, and in some sense more or less acutely the consciousness of the fact, that 'we have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'?

There is the fontal source of all sorrow, for even to the most superficial observation ninety per cent., at any rate, of man's misery comes either from his own or from others' wrongdoing, and for the rest, it is regarded in the eye of faith as being sorrow that is needful because of sin, in order to discipline and to purify. But here stands the fact, that king and clown, philosopher and fool, men of culture and men of ignorance, all of us, through all the ages, manifest the unity of our nature in this—I was going to say most chiefly—that lapses from the path of rectitude, and indulgence in habits, thoughts, feelings, and actions, which even our consciences tell us are wrong, characterise us all.

Hence the profound wisdom of Christ and of His Gospel in that, when it begins the task of healing, it does not peddle and potter on the surface, but goes

straight to the heart, with true instinct flies at the head, like a wise physician pays little heed to secondary and unimportant symptoms, but grapples with the disease, makes the tree good, and leaves the good tree to make, as it will, the fruit good.

The first thing to do to heal men's misery, is to make them pure; and the first step in the great method by which a man can be made pure, is to assure him of a divine forgiveness for the past. So the sneers that we often hear about Christian 'philanthropists taking tracts to people when they want soup,' and the like, are excessively shallow sneers, and indicate nothing more than this, that the critic has superficially diagnosed the disease, and is woefully wrong about the remedy. God forbid that I should say one word that would seem to depreciate the value of other forms of beneficence, or to cast doubt upon the purity of motives, or even to be lacking in admiration for the enthusiasm that fills and guides many an earnest man and woman, working amongst the squalid vice of our great cities and of our complex and barbarous civilisation to-day. I would recognise all their work as good and blessed; but, oh! dear brethren, it deals with the surface, and you will have to go a great deal deeper down than æsthetic, or intellectual, or economical, or political reformation and changes reach, before you touch the real reason why men and women are miserable in this world. And you will only effectually cure the misery, but you certainly then will do it, when you begin where the misery begins, and deal first with sin. The true 'saviour of society' is the man that can go to his brother, and as a minister declaratory of the divine heart can say—'Brother, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.' And then, after that, the palsy will

go out of his limbs, and a new nervous energy will come into them, and he will rise, take up his bed, and walk.

II. Now, in the next place, notice, as coming out of this incident before us, the thought that forgiveness is an exclusively divine act.

There was, sitting by, with their jealous and therefore blind eyes, a whole crowd of wise men and religious formalists of the first water, collected together as a kind of ecclesiastical inquisition and board of triers, as one of the other evangelists tells us, out of every corner of the land. They had no care for the dewy pity that was in Christ's looks, or for the nascent hope that began to swim up into the poor, dim eye of the paralytic. But they had keen scent for heresy, and so they fastened with true feline instinct upon the one thing, 'This man speaketh blasphemies. Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

Ah! if you want to get people blind as bats to the radiant beauty of some lofty character, and insensible as rocks to the wants of a sad humanity, commend me to your religious formalists, whose religion is mainly a bundle of red tape tied round men's limbs to keep them from getting at things that they would like. These are the people who will be as hard as the nether millstones, and utterly blind to all enthusiasm and to all goodness.

But yet these Pharisees are right; perfectly right. Forgiveness *is* an exclusively divine act. Of course. For sin has to do with God only; vice has to do with the laws of morality; crime has to do with the laws of the land. The same act may be vice, crime, and sin. In the one aspect it has to do with myself, in the other with my fellows, in the last with God. And so evil considered as sin comes under God's control only, and

only He against whom it has been committed can forgive.

What is forgiveness? The sweeping aside of penalties? the shutting up of some more or less material hell? By no means: penalties are often left; when sins are crimes they are generally left; when sins are vices they are always left, thank God! But in so far as sin is sin, considered as being the perversion and setting wrong of my relation to Him, its consequences, which are its penalties, are swept away by forgiveness; for forgiveness, in its essence and deepest meaning, is neither more nor less than that the love of the person against whom the wrong has been done shall flow out, notwithstanding the wrong. Pardon is love rising above the ice-dam which we have piled in its course, and pouring into our hearts.

When you fathers and mothers forgive your children, what does it mean? Does it not mean that your love is neither deflected nor embittered any more, by reason of their wrongdoing, but pours upon them as of old? So God's forgiveness is at bottom — 'Child! there is nothing in my heart to thee, but pure and perfect love.' We fill the sky with mists, through which the sun itself has to look like a red ball of lurid fire. But it shines on the upper side of the mists all the same, and all the time, and thins them away and scatters them utterly, and shines forth in its own brightness on the rejoicing heart. Pardon is God's love, unchecked and unembittered, granted to the wrongdoer. And that is a divine act, and a divine act alone. Pharisees and Scribes were perfectly right. No man can forgive sins but God only.

And I might add, though it is somewhat aside from my direct purpose, God *can* forgive sin; which some

people nowadays say is impossible. The apparent impossibility arises only from shallow and erroneous notions of what forgiveness is. God does not—it might be too bold to say God cannot, if we believe in miracles—but as a matter of fact, God does not, usually interfere to hinder men from reaping, as regards this life, what they have sown. But as I say, that is not forgiveness; and is there any reason conceivable why it should be impossible for the divine love to pour down upon a sinful man who has forsaken his sin, and is trusting in God's mercy in Christ, just as if his sin was non-existent, in so far as it could condition or interfere with the flow of the divine mercy?

And I may say, further, we need a definite divine assurance of pardon. Ah! if you have ever been down into the cellars of your own hearts, and seen the ugly things that coil there, you will know that a vague trust in a vague God and a vague mercy is not enough to still the conscience that has once been stung into action. My brothers, you want neither priests nor ceremonies on the one hand, nor a mere peradventure of 'Oh! God is merciful!' on the other, in order to deal with that deepest need of your heart. Nothing but the King's own sign-manual on the pardon makes it valid; and unless you and I can, somehow or other, come to close grips with God, and get into actual contact with Him, and hear, somehow, with infallible certitude, as from His own lips, the assurance of forgiveness, there is not enough for our needs.

III. So I come to say, in the next place, that the incident before us teaches us that Jesus Christ claims and exercises this divine prerogative of forgiveness.

Mark His answer to these cavillers. He admits their promises absolutely. They said, 'No man can forgive

sins but God only.' If Christ was only a man, like us, standing in the same relation to the divine pardon that other teachers, saints, and prophets have stood, and had nothing more to do with it than simply, as I might do, to say to a troubled heart, 'My brother, be quite sure that God has forgiven you'; if Christ's relation to the divine forgiveness was nothing more than ministerial and declaratory, why, in the name, not of common sense only, but of veracity, did He not turn round to these men and say so? He was bound, by all the obligations of a religious teacher, to disclaim, as you or I would have done under similar circumstances, the misapprehension of His words: 'I use blasphemies? No! I am not speaking blasphemies. I know that God only can forgive sins, and I am doing no more than telling my poor brother here that his sins are forgiven by God.' But that is not His answer at all. What He says in effect is—'Yes; you are quite right. No man can forgive sins, but God only. I forgive sins. Whom think ye, then, that I, the Son of Man am? It is easy to say "Thy sins be forgiven thee"—far easier to say that than to say "Take up thy bed and walk," because one can verify and check the accomplishment of the saying in the one case, and one cannot in the other. The sentences are equally easy to pronounce, the things are equally difficult for a *man* to do, but the difference is that one of them can be verified and the other of them cannot. I will do the visible impossibility, and then I leave you to judge whether I can do the invisible one or not.'

Now, dear brethren, I have only one word to say about that, and it is this. We are here brought sharp up to a fork in the road. I know that it is not always a satisfactory way of arguing to compel a man to take

one horn or other of an alternative, but it is quite fair to do so in the present case; and I would press it upon some of you who, I think, urgently need to consider the dilemma. Either the Pharisees were quite right, and Jesus Christ, the meek, the humble, the Pattern of all lowly gentleness, the Teacher whom nineteen centuries confess that they have not exhausted, was an audacious blasphemer, or He was God manifest in the flesh. The whole context forbids us to take these words, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' as anything less than the voice of divine love wiping out the man's transgressions; and if Jesus Christ pretended or presumed to do that, there is no hypothesis that I know of which can save His character for the reverence of man, but that which sees in Him God revealed in manhood; the world's Judge, from whom the world may receive divine forgiveness.

IV. Jesus Christ here brings visible facts into the witness-box as the attesters of His invisible powers.

Of course the miracle was such a witness in a special way, inasmuch as it and forgiveness were equally divine prerogatives and acts. I need not dwell now upon what I have already observed in my introductory remarks, that our Lord here teaches us the relative importance of the attesting miracle and the thing attested, and regards the miracle as subordinate to the higher and spiritual work of bringing pardon.

But we may widen out this into the thought that the subsidiary effects of Christian faith in individuals, and of the less complete Christian faith which is diffused over society, do stand as very strong evidences of the reality of Christ's professions and claims to exercise this invisible power of pardon. Or, to put it into a concrete form, and to take an illustration which may

need large deductions. — Go into a Salvation Army meeting. Admit the extravagance, the coarseness, and all the rest which we educated and superfine Christians cannot stand. But when you have blown away the froth, is there not something left in the cup which looks uncommonly like the wine of the Kingdom? Are there not visible results of that, as of every earnest effort to carry the message of forgiveness to men, which create an immense presumption in favour of its reality and divine origin? Men reclaimed, passions tamed, homes that were pandemoniums made Bethels, houses of God. Wherever Christ's forgiving power really comes into a heart, life is beautified, is purified, is ennobled; and secondary and material benefits follow in the train.

I claim all the difference between Christendom and Heathendom as attestation of the reality of Christ's divine and atoning work. I say, and I believe it to be a valid and a good argument as against much of the doubt of this day, 'If you seek His monument, look around.' His own answer to the question, 'Art thou He that should come?' is valid still: 'Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear'; the dead are raised, the deaf ears are opened; faculties that lie dormant are quickened, and in a thousand ways the swift spirit of life flows from Him and vitalises the dead masses of humanity.

Let any system of belief or of no belief do the like if it can. This rod has budded at any rate, let the magicians do the same with their enchantments.

Now, Christian men and women, 'ye are My witnesses,' saith the Lord. The world takes its notions of Christianity, and its belief in the power of Christianity, a great deal more from you than it does from preachers

and apologists. *You* are the Bibles that most men read. See to it that your lives represent worthily the redeeming and the ennobling power of your Master.

And as for the rest of you, do not waste your time trying to purify the stream twenty miles down from the fountainhead, but go to the source. Do not believe, brother, that your palsy, or your fever, your paralysis of will towards good, or the unwholesome ardour with which you are impelled to wrong, and the consequent misery and restlessness, can ever be healed until you go to Christ—the forgiving Christ—and let Him lay His hand upon you; and from His own sweet and infallible lips hear the word that shall come as a charm through all your nature: ‘Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.’ ‘Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened; then shall the lame man leap as an hart’;—then limitations, sorrows, miseries, will pass away, and forgiveness will bear fruit in joy and power, in holiness, health and peace.

THE CALL OF MATTHEW

‘And as Jesus passed forth from thence, He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him. 10. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? 12. But when Jesus heard that, He said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. 13. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. 14. Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not? 15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. 16. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. 17. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.’—MATT. IX. 9-17.

ALL three evangelists connect the call of Matthew immediately with the cure of the paralytic, and follow

it with an account of Christ's answers to sundry cavils from Pharisees and John's disciples. No doubt, the spectacle of this new Teacher taking a publican into His circle of disciples, and, not content with such an outrage on all proper patriotic feeling, following it up with scandalous companionship with the sort of people that a publican could get to accept his hospitality, sharpened hatred and made suspicion prick its ears. Mark and Luke call the publican Levi, he calls himself Matthew, the former being probably his name before his discipleship, the latter, that by which he was known thereafter. Possibly Jesus gave it him, as in the cases of Simon, and perhaps Bartholomew. But, however acquired, it superseded the old one, as the fact that it appears in the lists of the apostles in both the other evangelists and in Acts, shows. Its use here may be a trace of a touching desire to make sure that readers, who only knew him as Matthew, should understand who this publican was. It is like the little likenesses of themselves, in some corner of a background, that early painters used to slip into a picture of Madonna and angels. There was no vanity in the wish, for he says nothing about his sacrifices, leaving it to Luke to tell that 'he left all,' but he *does* crave that his brethren, who read, should know that it was he whom Jesus honoured by His call.

The condensed narrative emphasises three things, (1) his occupation with his ordinary business when that wonderful summons thrilled his soul; (2) the curt authoritative command, and (3) the swift obedience. As to the first, Capernaum was on a great trade route, and the custom-house officers there would have their hands full. This one was busy at his work, hateful and shameful as it was in Jewish eyes, and into that sordid

atmosphere, like a flash of light into a mephitic cavern full of unclean creatures, came the transcendent mercy of Jesus' summons. There is no region of life so foul, so mean, so despicable in men's eyes, but that the quickening Voice will enter there. We do not need to be in temples or about sacred tasks in order to hear it. It summons us in, and sometimes from, our daily work. Well for those who know whose Voice it is, and do not mistake it for some Eli's!

No doubt this was not the first of Matthew's knowledge of Jesus. Living in Capernaum, he would have had many opportunities of hearing Him or of Him, and his heart and conscience may have been stirred. As he sat in his 'tolbooth,' feeling contempt and hatred poured on him, he, no doubt, had had longings to get nearer to the One whose voice was gentle, and His looks, love. So the call would come to him as the fulfilment of a dim hope, and it would be a joyful surprise to know that Jesus wished to have him for a disciple as much as he wished to have Jesus for a Teacher. The ring of fire and hate within which he had been imprisoned was broken, and there was One who cared to have him, and who would not shrink from his touch. In the light of that assurance, the call became, not a summons to give anything up, but an invitation to receive a better possession than all with which he was called to part. And if we saw things as they are, would it not always be so to us? 'Follow Me' does mean, Forsake earth and self, but it means still more: Take what is more than all. It parts from these because it unites to Jesus. Therefore it means gain, not deprivation. And it condenses all rules for life into one, for to follow Him is the sum of all duty, and yields the perfect pattern of conduct and character, while it

is also the secret of all blessedness, and the talisman that assures a man of continual progress. They who follow are near, and will reach, Him. Of course, if His servants follow Him, it stands to reason that one day, 'where I am there shall also My servants be.' So in that command lie a sufficient guide for earth, and a sure guarantee for heaven.

'And he arose and followed Him.' That is the only thing that we are told of Matthew. We hear no more of him, except that he made a feast in his house on the occasion. No doubt he did his work as an apostle, but oblivion has swallowed up all that. A happy fate to be known to all the world for all time, only by this one thing, that he unconditionally, immediately and joyfully obeyed Christ's call! He might have said: 'How can I leave my work? I must make up my accounts, hand over my papers, do a hundred things in order to wind up matters, and I must postpone following till then.' But he sprang up at once. He would have abundant opportunities to settle all details afterwards, but if he let this opportunity of taking his place as a disciple pass, he might never have another. There are some things that are best done gradually and slowly, but obedience to Christ's call is not one of them. Prompt obedience is the only safety. The psalmist knew the danger of delay when he said: 'I made haste and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.'

Matthew does not tell us that *he* made the feast, but Luke does. It was the natural expression of his thankfulness and joy for the new bond. His knowledge was small, but his love was great. How could he honour Jesus enough? But he was a pariah in Capernaum, and the only guests he could assemble

were, like himself, outcasts from 'respectable society.' In popular estimation all publicans were regarded without any more ado as 'sinners,' but probably that designation is here applied to disreputable folks of various kinds and degrees of shadiness, who gravitated to Matthew and his class, because, like him, they were repulsed by every one else. Even outcasts hunger for society, and manage to get a community of their own, in which they find some glow of comradeship, and some defence from hatred and contempt. Even lepers herd together and have their own rules of intercourse.

But what a scandal in the eyes not only of Pharisees, but of all the proper people in Capernaum, Jesus' going to such a gathering of disreputables would be, we may estimate if we remember that they did not know His reason, but thought that He went because He liked the atmosphere and the company. 'Like draws to like' was the conclusion suggested, in the absence of His own explanation. The Pharisee conceived that his duty in regard to publicans and sinners was to keep as far from them as he could, and his strait-laced self-righteousness had never dreamed of going to them with an open heart, and trying to win them to a better life. Many so-called followers of Jesus still take that attitude. They gather up their skirts round them daintily, and never think that it would be liker their Lord to sweep away the mud than to pick their steps through it, caring mainly to keep their own shoes clean.

The feast was probably spread in some courtyard or open space, to which, as is the Eastern custom, uninvited spectators could have access. It is quite in accordance with the usage of the times and land that the Phari-

sees should have been onlookers, and should have been able to talk to the disciples. No doubt their colloquy became animated, and perhaps loud, so that it could easily attract Christ's attention. He answered for Himself, and the tone of His reply is friendly and explanatory, as if He recognised that the questioners genuinely wished to know 'why' He was sitting in such company.

It discloses His motive, and thereby sweeps away all insinuations that He consorted with sinners because their company was congenial. It was precisely for the opposite reason, because He was so unlike them. He came among these sinners as a physician; and who wonders at *his* being beside the sick? He does not spend his days by their bedsides because he likes the atmosphere, but because it is his business to make them well. Now, in that comparison, Jesus pronounces no opinion on the correctness of the Pharisees' estimate of themselves as 'righteous,' or of publicans as sinners, but simply takes them on their own ground. But He does make a great claim for Himself, and speaks out of His consciousness of power to heal men's worst disease, sin. It is a tremendous assertion to make of oneself, and its greatness is enhanced by the quiet way in which it is stated as a thought familiar to Himself. What right had He to pose as the physician for humanity, and how can such a claim be reconciled with His being 'meek and lowly in heart'? If He Himself was one of the sick and needed healing, how can He be the healer of the rest? If being a sinful man, as we all are, He made such a claim, what becomes of the reverence which is paid to Him as a great religious Teacher, and where has His 'sweet reasonableness' vanished?

Jesus passes from explanation of His personal relation to the publicans to adduce the broad principle which should shape the Pharisees' relation to them, as it had shaped His. Hosea had said long ago that God delighted more in 'mercy' than in 'sacrifice.' Kindly helpfulness to men is better worship than exact performance of any ritual. Sacrifice propitiates God, but mercy imitates Him, and imitation is the perfection of divine service. Jesus here speaks as all the prophets had spoken, and smites with a deadly stroke the mechanical formalism which in every age stiffens religion into ceremonies and neglects love towards God, expressed in mercy to men. He lays bare the secret of His own life, and He thereby lays on His followers the obligation of making it the moving impulse of theirs.

The great general truth is followed, as it has been preceded, by a plain statement of Jesus' own conception of His mission in the world. 'I came,' says He, hinting at the fact that He was before He was born, and that His Incarnation was His voluntary act. True, He was sent, and we speak of His mission, but also He 'came,' and we speak of His advent. 'To repentance' is omitted by the best editors as being brought over from Luke, where it is genuine. But it is a correct gloss on the simple word 'call,' though 'repentance' is but a small part of that to which He summons. He calls us to repent; He calls us to Himself; He calls us to self-surrender; He calls us to Eternal Life; He calls us to a better feast than Matthew had spread. But we must recognise that we are sinners, or we shall never realise that His invitation is for us, nor ever feel that we need a physician, and have in Him, and in Him alone, the Physician whom we need.

The Pharisees objected to Jesus' feasting, and could

scarcely in the same breath find fault with Him for not fasting, but they put forward some of John's disciples to bring that fresh objection. Common hatred is a strong cement, and often holds opposites together for a while. It was bad for John's followers that they should be willing to say, 'We and the Pharisees.' They had travelled far from the days when their master had called the same class a 'generation of vipers'! Their keen desire to uphold the honour of their teacher, whose light they saw paling before the younger Jesus, made them hostile to Him, and, as is usually the case, the followers were more partisan than the leader. Religious antagonism sometimes stoops to very strange alliances. The two questions brought together in this context are noticeably alike, and noticeably different. Both ask for the reason of conduct which they do not go the length of impugning. They seem to be desirous of enlightenment, they are really eager to condemn. Both avoid seeming to call in question the acts of the persons addressed, for the Pharisees interrogate the *disciples* as to the reason for *Jesus'* conduct, while John's disciples ask from *Jesus* the reason of His disciples' conduct. In both, mock respectfulness covers lively hatred.

Our Lord's first answer is as profound as it is beautiful, and veils, while it reveals, a lofty claim for Himself and a solemn foresight of His death, and lays down a great and fruitful principle as to the relations between spiritual moods and outward acts of religion. His speaking of Himself as 'the Bridegroom' would recall to some of His questioners, and that with a touch of shame, John's nobly humble acceptance of the subordinate place of the bride-

groom's friend and elevation of Jesus to that of the bridegroom. But it was not merely a rebuking quotation from John's witness, but the expression of His own unclouded and continual consciousness of what He was to humanity, and of what humanity could find in Him, as well as a sovereign appropriating to Himself of many prophetic strains. What depth of love, what mysterious blending of spirit, what adoring, lowly obedience, what perfection of protecting care, what rapture of possession, what rest of heart in trust, what dower of riches are dimly shadowed in that wonderful emblem, will never be known till the hour of the marriage-supper of the Lamb, when 'His bride hath made herself ready.' But across the light there flits a shadow. It is but for a moment, and it meant little to the hearers, but it meant much to Him. For He could not look forward to winning His bride without seeing the grim Cross, and even athwart the brightness of the days of companionship with His humble friends, came the darkness on His soul, though not on theirs, of the violent end when He 'shall be taken from them.' The hint fell apparently on deaf ears, but it witnesses to the continual presence in the mind of Jesus of His sufferings and death. The certainty that He must die was not forced on Him by the failure of His efforts as His career unfolded itself. It was no disappointment of bright earlier hopes, as is the case with many a disillusionised reformer, who thought at the outset that he had only to speak and all men would listen. It was the clearly discerned goal from the first. 'The Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom.'

But our Lord here lays down a broad principle, which, if applied as it was meant to be, would lift a

heavy burden of outward observance off the Christian consciousness. Fast when you are sad; feast when you are glad. Let the disposition, the mood, the moment's circumstance, mould your action. There is no virtue or sanctity in observances which do not correspond to the inner self. What a charter of liberty is proclaimed in these quiet words! What mountains of ceremonial unreality, oppressive to the spirit, are cast into the sea by them! How different Christendom would have been and would be to-day, if Christians had learned the lesson of these words!

The two condensed parables or extended metaphors, which follow the vindication of the disciples, carry the matter further, and lay down a principle which is intended to cover not only the question in hand, their non-observance of Jewish regulations as to fasting, but the whole subject of the relations of the new word, which Jesus felt that He brought, to the old system. The same consciousness of His unique mission which prompted His use of the term 'bridegroom,' shines through the two metaphors of the new cloth and the new wine. He knows that He is about to bring a new garb to men, and to give them new wine to drink, and He knows that what He brings is no mere patch on a worn-out system, but a new fermenting force, which demands fresh vehicles and modes of expression. The two metaphors take up different aspects of one thought. To try to mend an old coat with a bit of unshrunk cloth would only make a worse dissolution of continuity, for as soon as a shower fell on it the patch would shrink, and, in shrinking, pull the thin pieces of the old garment adjoining it to itself. Judaism was already 'rent' and worn too thin to be capable of repair. The only

thing to be done was 'as a vesture' to 'fold it up' and shape a new garment out of new cloth. What was true as to the supremely new thing which He brought into the world remains true, in less eminent degree, of the less acute differences between the Old and the New, within Christianity itself. There do come times when its externals become antiquated, worn thin and torn, and when patching is useless. Christian men, like others, constitutionally incline to conservatism or to progress, and the one temperament needs to be warned against obstinately preserving old clothes, and the other against eagerly insisting that they are past mending.

But a patch and a worn garment do not wholly describe the relations of the old and the new. Freshly made wine, still fermenting, and old, stiff wine-skins which have lost their elasticity suggest further thoughts. Now we have to do with containing vessel *versus* contents, with a fermenting force *versus* stiffened forms. To put that into these will destroy both. For example, if the struggle of the Judaisers in the early Church had succeeded, and Christianity had become a Jewish sect, it would have dwindled to nothing, as the Jewish-minded Christians did. The wine must have bottles. Every great spiritual renovating force must embody itself in institutions. Spiritual emotions must express themselves in acts of worship, spiritual convictions must speak in a creed. But the containing vessel must be congruous with, and still more, it must be created by, the contained force, as there are creatures who frame their shells to fit the convolutions of their bodies, and build them up from their own substance. Forms are good, as long as they can stretch if need be; when they are

too stiff to expand, they restrict rather than contain the wine, and if short-sighted obstinacy insists on keeping *it in them*, there will be a great spill and loss of much that is precious.

THE TOUCH OF FAITH AND THE TOUCH OF CHRIST

'While He spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live. 19. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did His disciples. 20. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment: 21. For she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole. 22. But Jesus turned Him about, and when He saw her, He said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. 23. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, 24. He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn. 25. But when the people were put forth, He went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. 26. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land. 27. And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed Him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. 28. And when He was come into the house, the blind men came to Him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. 29. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. 30. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. 31. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad His fame in all that country.'—MATT. ix. 18-31.

THE three miracles included in the present section belong to the last group of this series. Those of the second group were all effected by Christ's word. Those now to be considered are all effected by touch. The first two are intertwined. The narrative of the healing of the woman is embedded in the account of the raising of Jairus's daughter.

Mark the impression of calm consciousness of power and leisurely dignity produced by Christ's having time to pause, even on such an errand, in order to heal, by the way, the other sufferer. The father and the disciples would wonder at Him as He stayed His steps,

and be apt to feel that priceless moments were being lost; but He knows His own resources, and can afford to let the child die while He heals the woman. The one shall receive no harm by the delay, and the other will be blessed. Our Lord is sitting at the feast which Matthew gave on the occasion of his call, engaged in vindicating His sharing in innocent festivity against the cavils of the Pharisees, when the summons to the death-bed comes to Him from the lips of the father, who breaks in on the banquet with his imploring cry. Matthew gives the story much more summarily than the other evangelists, and does not distinguish, as they do, between Jairus's first words, 'at the point of death,' and the message of her actual decease, which met them on the way. The call of sorrow always reaches Christ's ear, and the cry for help is never deemed by Him an interruption. So this 'man, gluttonous and a wine-bibber,' as these Pharisees thought Him, willingly and at once leaves the house of feasting for that of mourning. How near together, in this awful life of ours, the two lie, and how thin the partition walls! Well for those whose feasts do not bar them out from hearing the weeping next door.

As the crowd accompanies Jesus, His hasting love is, for a moment, diverted by another sufferer. We never go on an errand of mercy but we pass a hundred other sorrowing hearts, so close packed lie the griefs of men. This woman is a poor shrinking creature, broken down by long illness (which had lasted for the same length of time as the joyous life of Jairus's child), made more timid by disappointed hopes of cure, and depressed by poverty to which her many doctors had brought her. She does not venture to stop this new Rabbi-physician, as He goes with the church dignitary of the town to

heal his daughter, but lets Him pass before she can make up her mind to go near Him; and then she comes creeping up behind the crowd, puts out her wasted, trembling hand to the hem of His garment,—and she is whole.

The other evangelists give us a more extended account, but Matthew throws into prominence, in his condensed narrative, the essential points.

Notice her real but imperfect faith. There was unquestionable confidence in Christ's power, and very genuine desire for healing. But it was a very ignorant faith. She believes that her touch of the garment will heal without Christ's will or knowledge, much more His pitying love, having any part in it. She thinks that she may win her desire furtively, and may carry it away, and He be none the wiser nor the poorer for the stolen blessing. What utter, blank ignorance of His character and way of working! What gross superstition! Yes, and withal what a hunger of desire, what absolute assurance of confidence that one finger-tip on His robe was enough! Therefore she had her desire, and her Healer recognised her faith as true, though blended with much ignorance of Him. Her error was very like that which many Christians entertain with less excuse. To attach importance to external means of grace, rites, ordinances, sacraments, outward connection with Christian organisations, is the very same misconception in a slightly different form. Such error is always near us; it is especially rife in countries where there has long been a visible Church. It has received strange new vigour to-day, partly by reaction from extreme rationalism, partly by the growing cultivation of the æsthetic faculties. It is threatening to corrupt the simplicity and spirituality of Christian

worship, and needs to be strenuously resisted. But the more we have to fight against it, the more do we need to remember that, along with this clinging to the hem of the garment instead of to the heart of its Wearer, there may be a very real trust, which might shame some of those who profess to hold a less sensuous form of faith. Many a poor soul clasping a crucifix clings to the Cross. Many a devout heart kneeling at mass sees through the incense-smoke the face of Christ.

This woman's faith was selfish. She wanted health; she did not care much about the Healer. She would have been quite contented to have had no more to do with Him, if she could only have stolen out of the crowd cured. She would have had little gratitude to the unconscious Giver of a stolen good. So, many a Christian life in its earlier stages is more absorbed with its own deep misery and its desire for deliverance, than with Him. Love comes after, born of the experience of His love. But faith precedes love, and the predominant motive impelling to faith at first is distinctly self-regard. That is all as it should be. The most purely self-absorbed wish to escape from the most rudely pictured hell is often the beginning of a true trust in Christ, which, in due time, will be elevated into perfect consecration. Some of our modern teachers, who are shocked at Christianity because it lays the foundation of the most self-denying morality in such 'selfishness,' would be none the worse for going to school to this story, and learning from it how a desire for nothing more than to get rid of a painful disease, started a process which turned a life into a peaceful, thankful surrender of the cured self to the love and service of the mighty Healer.

Observe, next, how Christ answers the imperfect faith, and, by answering, corrects and confirms it. Matthew omits Christ's question as to who touched Him, the disciples' reply, and His renewed asseveration that He was conscious of power having gone forth from Him. All these belong to the loving method by which our Lord sought to draw forth an open acknowledgment. Womanly diffidence, enfeebled health, her special disease, all made the woman wish to hide herself. She wanted to steal away unnoticed, as she hoped that she had come. But Christ forces her to stand out before all the crowd, and there, with all eyes upon her,—cold, cruel eyes, some of them—to conquer her shame, and tell all the truth. Strange kindness that; strangely contrasted with His ordinary desire to avoid notoriety, and with His ordinary tender consideration for shrinking weakness! He did it for her sake, not for His own. She is changed from timidity to courage. At one moment she stretches out her wasted finger, a tremulous invalid; at the next, she flings herself at His feet, a confessor. He would have us testify for Him, because faith unavowed, like a plant in the dark, is apt to become pale and sickly; but ere He bids us own His name, He pours into our hearts, in answer to our secret appeal, the health of His own life, and the blissful consciousness of that great gift which makes the tongue of the dumb sing.

His words to her are full of tenderness. She receives the name of 'daughter.' Gently He encourages her timidity by that 'Be of good cheer,' and then He sets right her error: 'Thy faith'—not thy finger—'hath made thee whole.' There was no real connection between the touch of the robe and healing; but the

woman thought that there was, and so Christ stooped to her childish thought, and allowed her to prescribe the road which His mercy should take. But He would not leave her with her error. The true means of contact between us and Him is not our outward contact with external means of grace, but the touch of our spirits by faith. Faith is nothing in itself, and heals only because it brings us into union with His power, which is the sole cause of our healing. Faith is the hand which receives the blessing. It may be a wasted and tremulous hand, like that which this woman laid lightly on His robe. But He feels its touch, though a universe presses on Him, and He answers. Not the garment's hem, but Christ's love, is the cause of our salvation. Not an outward contact with it or with Him, but faith, is the condition on which His life, which knows no disease, pours into our souls. The hand of my faith lifted to Him will receive into its empty palm and clasping fingers the special blessing for my special wants.

The other evangelists tell us that, at the moment of His words to the woman, the messengers came bearing tidings of the child's death. How Jairus must have grudged the pause! A word from Christ, like the pressure of His hand, heartened him. Like a river turned from its course for a space, to fill some empty reservoir, His love comes back to its original direction. How abundant the power and mercy, to which such a work as that just done was but a parenthesis! The doleful music and the shrill shrieks of Eastern mourning, which met them as they entered Jairus's house, disturbed the sanctity of the hour, and were in strong contrast with the majestic calmness of Jesus. Not amid venal lamentations and excited cries will He do

His work. He bids the noisy crowd forth with curt, almost stern, command, and therein rebukes all such hollow and tumultuous scenes, in the presence of the stillness of death, still more where faith in Him has robbed it of its terror, in robbing it of its perpetuity. It is strange that believing readers should have thought that our Lord meant to say that the little girl was not really dead, but only in a swoon. The scornful laughter of the flute-players and hired mourners understood Him better. They knew that it was real death, as men count death, and, as has often been the case, the laughter of His foes has served to establish the truth. That was not worthy to be called death from which the child was so soon and easily to be awaked. But, besides this special application to the case in hand, that great saying of our Lord's carries the blessed truth that, since He has come, death is softened into sleep for all who love Him. The euphemism is not peculiar to Christianity, but has a deeper meaning on Christian lips than when Greeks or Romans spoke of the eternal sleep. Others speak of death by any name rather than its own, because they fear it so much. The Christian does so, because he fears it so little,—and, as a matter of fact, the use of the word death as meaning merely the separation of soul and body by the physical act is exceptional in the New Testament. This name of sleep, sanctioned thus by Christ, is the sweetest of all. It speaks of the cessation of connection with the world of sense, and 'long disquiet merged in rest.' It does not imply unconsciousness, for we are not unconscious when we sleep, but only unaware of externals. It holds the promise of waking when the sun comes. So it has driven out the ugly old name. Our tears flow less bitterly when we think of our dear

ones as 'sleeping in Jesus.' Their bodies, like this little child's, are dead, but *they* are not. They rest, conscious of their own blessedness and of Him 'in whom they live, and have their being,' whether they 'move' or no.

Then comes the great deed. The crowd is shut out. For such a work silence is befitting. The father and mother, with His foremost three disciples, go with Him into the chamber. There is no effort, repeated and gradually successful, as when Elisha raised the dead boy; no praying, as when Peter raised Dorcas; only the touch of the hand in which life throbbed in fulness, and, as the other narratives record, two words, spoken strangely to, and yet more strangely heard by, the dull, cold ear of death. Their echo lingered long with Peter, and Mark gives us them in the original Aramaic. But Matthew passes them by, as he seems here to have desired to emphasise the power of Christ's touch. But touch or word, the real cause of the miracle was simply His will; and whether He used media to help men's faith, or said only 'I will,' mattered little. He varied His methods as the circumstances of the recipients required, and in order that they and we might learn that He was tied to none. These miracles of raising the dead are three in number. Jairus's daughter is raised from her bed, just having passed away; the widow's son at Nain from his bier, having been for a little longer separated from his body; Lazarus from the grave, having been dead four days. A few minutes, or days, or four thousand years, are one to His power. These three are in some sense the first-fruits of the great harvest; the stars that shone out singly before all the heaven is in a blaze. For, though they died again, and so left to Him the precedence in resurrection, as in all besides, they are still prophetic of His

power in the hour when they 'that sleep in the dust' shall awake at His voice. Blessed they who, like this little maiden, are awakened, not only by His voice, but by His touch, and to find, as she did, their hand in His!

The third of these miracles, which Matthew seems to reckon as the second in the group, because he treats the two former as so closely connected as to be but one in numeration, need not detain us long. It is found only in this Gospel. The first point to be observed in it is the cry of these two blind men. There is something pathetic and exquisitely natural in the two being together, as is also the case in the similar miracle, at a later period, on the outskirts of Jericho. Equal sorrows drive men together for such poor help and solace as they can give each other. They have common experiences which isolate them from others, and they creep close for warmth and companionship. All the blind men in the Gospels have certain resemblances. One is that they are all sturdily persevering, as perhaps was easier for them because they could not see the impatience of the listeners, and possibly because, in most cases, persistent begging was their trade, and they were used to refusals. But a more important trait is their recognition of Jesus as 'Son of David.' Blind as they are, they see more than do the seeing. Thrown in upon themselves, they may have been led to ponder the old words, and by their affliction been made more ready to welcome One who, if He were Messiah, was coming with a special blessing for them—'to open the blind eyes.' Men who deeply desire a good are quick to listen to the promise of its accomplishment. So these two followed Him along the road, loudly and perseveringly calling out their profession of faith, and their entreaty for sight.

The next point is our Lord's treatment. He let them cry on, apparently unheeding. Had, then, the two miracles just done exhausted His stock of power or of pity? Certainly His reason was, as it always was, their good. We do not know why it was better for them to have to wait, and continue their entreaty; but we may be quite sure that the reason for all His delays is the same,—the larger blessing which comes with the answer when it comes, and the large blessings which may be gathered while we wait its coming. Christ's question to them, when at last they have found their way even indoors, holds out more hope than they had yet received. By it, Christ established a close relation with them, and implied to them that He was willing to answer their cry. One can fancy how the poor blind faces would light up with a flush of eager expectation, and how swift would be the answer. The question is not cold or inquisitorial. It is more than half a promise, and a powerful aid to the faith which it requires.

There is something very beautiful and pathetic in the simple brevity of the unhesitating answer, 'Yea, Lord.' Sincerity needs few words. Faith can put an infinite deal of meaning into a monosyllable. Their eagerness to reach the goal made their answer brief. But it was enough. Again the hand which had clasped the maiden's palm is put out and laid gently on the useless eyes, and the great word spoken, 'According to your faith be it unto you.' Their blindness made the touch peculiarly fitting in their case, as bringing evidence of sense to those who could not see the gracious pity of His looks. The word spoken was, like that to the centurion, a declaration of the power of faith, which determines the measure, and often the manner, of His gifts to us. The containing vessel not only settles the quantity of, but the shape assumed by, the water which

is taken up in it from the sea. Faith, which keeps inside of Christ's promises (and what goes outside of them is not faith), decides how much of Christ we shall have for our very own. He condescends to run the molten gold of His mercies into the moulds which our faith prepares.

These two men, who had used their tongues so well in their persistent cry for healing, went away to make a worse use of them in telling everywhere of their cure. Jesus desired silence. Possibly He did not wish His reputation as a mere worker of miracles to be spread abroad. In all His earlier ministry He avoided publicity, singularly contrasting therein with the evident desire to make Himself the centre of observation which marks its close. He dreaded the smoky flame of popular excitement. His message was to individuals, not to crowds. It was a natural impulse to tell the benefits these two had received; but truer gratitude and deeper faith would have made them obey His lightest word, and have shut their mouths. We honour Christ most, not by taking our way of honouring Him, but by absolute obedience.

The final miracle of the nine (or ten) marshalled in long procession in chapters viii. and ix. is told with singular brevity. There is nothing individual in our Lord's treatment of the sufferer, as there was in the previous healing of the two blind men, and no details are given of either the appeal to His pity or the method of His cure. The dumb demoniac could lift no cry, nor exercise any faith, and all the petitions and hopes of his bearers were expressed in the act of bringing the sufferer thither, and silently setting him there before these eyes of universal pity. It was enough. With Jesus, to see was to compassionate, and to compassionate was to help. In the other

instances of casting out demons, the method is an authoritative command, addressed not to the possessed, but to the alien personality that has seized on him, and we conclude that such was the method here. Jesus undoubtedly believed in demoniacal possession, if we can at all rely on the Gospel narratives; and it may be humbly suggested that there are dark depths in humanity, which had need to be fathomed more completely, before any one is warranted in dogmatically pronouncing that He was wrong in His diagnosis. There are ugly facts which should give pause to those who are inclined to say—‘There are no demons, and if there were, they could not dominate a human consciousness.’

But the effects of the miracle are emphasised more than itself. They are two, neither of them what might or should have been. The dumb man is not said to have used his recovered speech to thank his deliverer, nor is there any sign that he clung to Him, either for fear of being captured again or in passionate gratitude. It looks as if he selfishly bore away his blessing and cared nothing for its giver. That is very human, and we all are too often guilty of the same sin. Nor was the effect on the multitudes much better, for they were only struck with vulgar wonder, which had no moral quality in it and led to nothing. They saw ‘the miracle,’ that is, the wonderfulness of the act made some dint even on their minds, but these were either too fluid to retain the impression, or too hard to let it be deep, and so it soon filled up again. We have to think of Christ’s deeds as ‘signs,’ not only as ‘wonders,’ or they will do little to draw us to Him. Wonder is a necessarily evanescent emotion, which may indeed set something better stirring in us, but is quite as likely to die barren.

The Pharisees did not wonder, and did look into the phenomenon with sharp eyes; and in so far, they were in advance of the gaping multitudes. They were much too superior persons to be astonished at anything, and they had already settled on a formula which was delightfully easy of application, and had the further advantage of turning the miracles into evidences that the doer of them was a child of the Devil. It appears to have been a well-worked formula too, for it is found again in chap. xii. 24, and in Luke xi. 15, in the account of another cure of a dumb demoniac. It is possible that the incident now before us may be the same as this, but there is nothing improbable in the occurrence of such a case twice, nor in the repetition of what had become the commonplace of the Pharisaic polemic. But what a piercing example that explanation is of the blinding power of prejudice, determined to hold on to a foregone conclusion, and not to see the sun at noon! Jesus in league with 'the prince of the devils'! And that was gravely said by religious authorities! They saw the loveliness of His perfect life, His gentle goodness, His self-forgetting love, His swift-springing pity, and they set it all down to His commerce with the Evil One. He was so good that He must be more than humanly bad.

A CHRISTLIKE JUDGMENT OF MEN

'But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.'—
MATT. ix. 36.

IN the course of our Lord's wandering life of teaching and healing, there had naturally gathered around Him a large number of persons who followed Him from

place to place, and we have here cast into a symbol the impression produced upon Him by their outward condition. That is to say, He sees them lying there weary, and footsore, and travel-stained. They have flung themselves down by the wayside. There is no leader or guide, no Joshua or director to order their march; they are a worn-out, tired, unregulated mob, and the sight smites upon His eye, and it smites upon His heart. He says to Himself, if I may venture to put words into His lips, 'There are a worse weariness, and a worse wandering, and a worse anarchy, and a worse disorder afflicting men than that poor mob of tired pedestrians shows.' Matthew, who was always fond of showing the links and connections between the Old Testament and the New, casts our Lord's impression of what He then saw into language borrowed from the prophecy of Ezekiel (ch. xxxiv.), which tells of a flock that is scattered in a dark and cloudy day, that is broken, and torn, and driven away. I venture to see in the text three points: (1) Christ teaching us how to look at men; (2) Christ teaching us how to feel at such a sight; and (3) Christ teaching us what to do with the feeling. 'When He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion, because they fainted and were scattered abroad.' 'Then He said unto His disciples, *the harvest is plenteous, the labourers are few, pray ye some Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers unto thee to flourish.*' And then there follows, 'And when He had said these things unto His twelve disciples, He gave them power over all devils and unclean spirits to cast them out.' There are three points;—just a word or two about each necessarily.

Let us have our Lord teaching us how to look at the barren.

The picture of my text is, of course, in its broad outlines, very clear and intelligible, but there may be a little difficulty as to the precise force of the language. The obscurity of it is in some degree reflected in the margin of our Bibles; so, perhaps, you will permit one word of an expository nature. The description of the flock, 'Because they fainted and were scattered abroad,' is couched in the original in a couple of words, one of which means properly 'torn' or 'fainting,' according as one or other of two readings of the text is adopted, and the other means 'lying down.' Now, the former of these gives a very pathetic picture if we apply it to the individuals that made up the flock. We have then the image of the poor sheep that has lost its way, struggling through briars and thorns, getting out of them with its fleece all torn and hanging in strips dangling at its heels, or of it as lacerated by the beasts of the field to whom it is a prey. If we take the metaphor, as seems more probably to be intended, as applying not so much to the individuals as to the flock, then it comes to mean 'torn asunder,' 'thrown apart,' and gives us the notion of anarchic confusion into which the flock comes if there be no shepherd to lead it. Then the other word, which our Bible translates 'were scattered abroad,' seems to mean more properly 'lying down,' and it gives the idea of the poor, wearied creature, after all its struggles and wanderings, utterly beaten and dejected, having lost its way, at its wits' end and resourceless, flinging itself down there in despair, and panting its timid life out anywhere where it finds itself. So it comes to be a picture of the utter weariness and hopelessness of all men's efforts apart from that Guide and Shepherd, who alone can lead them in the way. And then both of these miserable states,

the laceration if you take the one explanation, the disintegration and casting apart if you take the other, the weariness and exhaustion, are traced to their source, they are 'as sheep having no shepherd.' He has gone, and so all this comes. With this explanation we may take the points of view that are thus suggested simply as they lie before us.

First of all, notice how here, as always to Jesus Christ, the outward was nothing, except as a symbol and manifestation of the inward; how the thing that He saw in a man was not the external accidents of circumstance or position, for His true, clear gaze and His loving, wise heart went straight to the essence of the matter, and dealt with the man not according to what he might happen to be in the categories of earth, but to what he was in the categories of heaven. All the same to Him whether it was some poor harlot, or a rabbi; all the same to Him whether it was Pilate on the judgment-seat, or the penitent thief hanging at His side. These gauds and shows were nothing; sheer away He cut them all, and went down to the hidden heart of the man, and He allocated and ranged them according to that. Christian men and women, do you try to do the same thing, and to get rid of all these superficial veils and curtains with which we drape ourselves and attitudinise in the world, and to see men as Christ saw them, both in regard to your judgment of them, and in regard to your judgment of yourselves? 'I am a scholar and a wise man; a great thinker; a rich merchant; a man of rising importance and influence.' Very well; what does that matter? 'I am ignorant or a pauper'; be it so. Let us get below all that. The one question worth asking and worth answering is, 'How am I affected towards Him?'

There are many temporary and local principles of arrangement and order among men; but they will all vanish some day, and there will be one regulating and arranging principle, and it is this: 'Do I love God in Jesus Christ, or do I not?' Oh! for myself, for yourself, and for all our outlook towards others, let us not forget that the inmost, deepest, hidden man of the heart is the man, and that all else is naught, and that its whole character is absolutely determined by its relation to Jesus Christ.

But this is somewhat aside from my main purpose, which is rather briefly to expand the various phases which, as I have already suggested, are included in such an emblem. The first of them is this: Try to think for yourselves of the condition of humanity as apart from Christ—shepherdless. That old metaphor of a shepherd which comes out of the Old Testament is there sometimes used to indicate a prophet, and sometimes to indicate a king. I suppose we may put both of these uses together, as far as our present purposes are concerned; and this is what I want to insist upon. I dare say some people here will think it is very old-fashioned, very narrow in these broad and liberal days; but what I would say is this, that unless Jesus Christ is both Guide and Teacher, we have neither guide nor teacher but are shepherdless without Him. There are plenty of rulers. There was no lack of other authority in the days of His flesh. There were crowds of rabbis, guides, and directors. The life of the nation was throttled by the authorities that had planted themselves upon its back, and yet Christ saw that there were none of those who were fit for the work, or afforded the adequate guidance. And so it is, now and always. There have been hosts of men who

have sought to impose their authority upon an era. Where is there one that has swayed passion, that has ruled hearts, that has impressed his own image on the will, that has made obedience an honour, and absolute, abject devotion to his command a very patent of nobility? Here, and nowhere beside. Besides that Christ there is no ruler amongst men who can come to them and say to his servant, 'Go,' and he goeth, and to this man, 'Do this,' and he doeth it. Obedience to any besides is treason against the dignity of our own nature; disobedience to Him is both treason against our nature and blasphemy against God. 'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ, Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.' *There* is the deepest reason for His rule.

And as for 'teacher,' whom are we to put up beside Him? Is it to be these dim figures of religious reformers that are gliding, ghostlike, to their doom, being wrapped round and round about by ever thicker and thicker folds of the inevitable oblivion that swallows all that is human? Brethren, by common consent it is Christ or nobody. Aaron dies upon Hor; Moses dies upon Pisgah; the teachers, the leaders, the guides, the under-shepherds, pass away one by one; and if this Christ be but a Man and a Teacher, He too will pass away. Shall I be thought very blind to the signs of the times if I say that I see no sign of His dominion being exhausted, of His influence being diminished, of His guidance being capable of being dispensed with? You may say, 'Oh, we do not want any teacher or guide; we do not want a shepherd.' I am not going to enter upon that question now at all, except just to say this, that the instincts of humanity rise up in contradiction, as it seems to me, of that cold and cheerless creed, and

that we have this fact staring us in the face, that men are made capable of a devotion and submission the most passionate, the most absolute, the most mighty force in their lives, to human guides and ensamples, and that it is all wasted unless there be somewhere a Man, our Brother, who shall come to us and say, 'All that ever went before Me are thieves and robbers; I am the Good Shepherd; follow Me, and ye shall not walk in darkness.' 'He saw the multitudes as sheep having no shepherd.'

Still further, take that other phase of the metaphor which, as I suggested, the text includes, namely, the idea of disintegration, the rending apart of social ties and union, unless there be the centre of unity in the shepherd of the flock. 'I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered,' says the old prophecy. Of course, for what is there to hold them together unless it be their guide and their director? So we are brought face to face with this plain prosaic rendering of the metaphor—that but for the centre of unity provided for mankind in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there is no satisfaction of the deep hunger for unity and society with which in that case God would have cursed mankind. For whilst there are many other bonds most true, most blessed, God-given, and mighty, such as that of the sacred unity of the family, and that of the nation and many others of which we need not speak, yet all these are constantly being disintegrated by the unresting waves of that gnawing sea of selfishness, if I may so say, which, like the waters upon our eastern coasts, eats and eats for ever at the base of the cliffs, so that society in all its forms, whether it be built upon identity of opinion, which is perhaps the shabbiest bond of all, or whether it be built upon purposes of

mutual action, which is a great deal better, or whether it be built upon hatred of other people, which is the modern form of patriotism, or whether it be built upon the domestic affections, which are the purest and highest of all—all the other bonds of society, such as creeds, schools, nations, associations, leagues, families, denominations, all go sooner or later. The base is eaten out of them, because every man that belongs to them has in him that tyrannous, dominant self, which is ever seeking to assert its own supremacy. Here is Babel, with its half-finished tower, built on slime; and there is Pentecost, with its great Spirit; here is the confusion, there is the unifying; here the disintegration, there the power that draws them all together. 'They were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd,' and one looks out over the world and sees great tracts of country and long dismal generations of time, in which the very thought of unity and charity and human bonds knitting men together has faded from the consciousness of the race, and then one turns to blessed, sweet, simple words that say, 'there shall be one flock and one shepherd,' and 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.' Drawing thus, He will draw them into the eternal, mighty bond of union that shall never be broken, and is all the more precious and all the more true because it is not a unity like the vulgar unities that express themselves in external associations. You know, of course, or if you do not know it will be a good thing that you should know, that that verse in John's Gospel which I have quoted has been terribly mangled by a little slip of our translators. Christ said, 'Other sheep I must bring which are not of this fold,' the fold being the external unity of the Jewish church

—an enclosure made of hurdles that you can stick in the ground. ‘I shall bring them,’ says He, ‘and there shall be one’—(not, as our Bible says, ‘fold,’—but something far better)—‘there shall be one flock’; which becomes a unity not by wattling round about it on the outside, but by a shepherd standing in the middle. ‘There shall be one flock and one shepherd’—a unity which is neither the destruction of the variety of the churches, nor the crushing of men, nationalities, and types of character all down into one dead level beneath the heel of a conqueror, but the unity which subsists in the many operations of the one Spirit, and is expressed by all the forms of the one inspired grace.

Then passing by altogether the other idea which I said was only doubtfully suggested by the words—namely, that of laceration and wounding—let me say a word about the last of the aspects of humanity when Christless, which is set forth in this text, and that is, the dejected weariness arising from the fruitless wanderings wherewith men are cursed. As a verse in the Book of Proverbs puts it, ‘The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because they know not how to go to the city.’ Putting aside the metaphor, the plain truth which it embodies is just this, that there is in all men’s souls a deep longing after peace and rest, after goodness and beauty and truth, and that all the strenuous efforts to satisfy these longings, either by social reforms or by individual culture and discipline, are pathetically vain and profitless, because there is none to guide them. The sheep go wandering in any direction, and with no goal; and wherever one has jumped, a dozen others will go after him, and so they are wearied out long before the day’s journey is ended, and they

never reach the goal. Put that into less vivid, and, therefore, as people generally suppose, more accurate, language, and it is a statement of the universal law of human history that, after any epoch of great aspirations and strong excitement of the noblest parts of human nature, there has always come a reaction of corruption and a collapse from weariness. What did 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' end in? A guillotine. What do all similar epochs end in, when they do not take the Christ to march ahead of them? An utter disgust and disillusion, and a despair of all progress. That is why wild revolutionists in their youth are always obstinate Conservatives in their old age. The wandering sheep are footsore, and they fling themselves down by the wayside. That is why heathenism presents to us the aspect that it does. There is nothing about it that seems to me more tragical than the weary languor that besets it. Do you ever think of the depth of pathetic, tragic meaning that there is in that verse in one of the Psalms, 'Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death'? There they sit, because there is no hope in rising and moving. They would have to grope if they arose, and so with folded hands they sit like the Buddha, which one great section of heathenism has taken as being the true emblem and ideal of the noblest life. Absolute passivity lays hold upon them all—torpor, stagnation, no dream of advance or progress. The sheep are dejected, despairing, anarchic, disintegrated, lacerated, guideless, and shepherdless—away from Christ. So He thought them. God give you and me grace, dear brethren, to see, as Christ saw, the condition of humanity and our own apart from Him.

II. And now let me say a word in the next place as to the second movement of His mind and heart here. He

teaches us not only how to think of men, but how that sight should touch us.

‘He was moved with compassion on them when He saw the multitude’—with the eye of a god, I was going to say, and the heart of a man. Pity belongs to the idea of divinity; compassion belongs to the idea of divinity incarnate; and the motion that passed across His heart is the motion that I would seek may pass, with its sweet and healing breath, across yours and mine. The right emotion for a Christian looking on the Christless crowds is pity, not aversion; pity, not anger; pity, not curiosity; pity, not indifference. How many of us walk the streets of the towns in which our lot is cast, and never know one touch of that emotion, when we look at these people here in England torn, and anarchic, and wearied, and shepherdless, within sound of our psalm-singing in our chapels? Why, on any Sunday there are thousands of men and women standing about the streets who, we may be sure, have not seen the inside of a church or a chapel since they were married, and that not one in five hundred of all the good people that are going with their prayer-books and hymn-books to church and chapel ever think anything about them as they pass them by; and some of them, perhaps, if they come to any especially disreputable one, will gather up their skirts and keep on the safe side of the pavement, and there an end of it. But Jesus Christ had no aversions. His white purity was a great deal nearer to the blackness of the woman that was a sinner, than was the leprous whiteness of the whited sepulchre of the self-righteous Pharisee. He had neither aversion, nor anger, nor indifference.

And, if I might venture to touch upon another matter,

compassion and not curiosity is an especial lesson for the day to the more thoughtful and cultivated amongst our congregations. I have just said that the appropriate Christian feeling in contemplating the state of the sheep without the Shepherd is compassion, not curiosity. That reminder is particularly needful in view of the prominence to-day of investigations into the new science of Comparative Religion. I speak with most unfeigned respect of it and of its teachers, and gratefully hail the wonderful light that it is casting upon ideas underlying the strange and often savage and obscene rites of heathenism; but it has a side of danger in it against which I would warn you all, especially young, reading men and women. The time has not yet come when we can afford to let such investigations be our principal occupation in the face of heathenism. If idolatry was dead we could afford to do that, but it is alive—the more's the pity; and it is not only a curious instance of the workings of man's intelligence, and a great apocalypse of earlier stages of society, but, besides that, it is a lie that is deceiving and damning our brethren, and we have got to kill it first and dissect it afterwards. So I say, do not only think of heathenism in its various forms as a subject for speculation and analysis; as much as you like of that, only do not let it drive out the other thing, and after you have tried to understand it, then come back to my text, 'He was moved with compassion.' And so pity, and neither anger, nor aversion, nor curiosity, nor indifference is what I urge as the Christian emotion.

III. Let us take this text as teaching us how Christ would have us act, after such emotion built and based upon such a look.

It is perfectly legitimate, although it is by no means the highest motive, to appeal to feeling as a stimulus to action. We have a right to base our urging of Christian men and women to missionary work either at home or abroad, upon the ground of the condition of the men to whom the Gospel has to be carried. I know that if taken alone it is a very inadequate motive. I believe that any failure that may be manifest in the interest of Christian people in missionary work is largely traceable to the blunder we have made in dwelling on superficial motives more than we ought to have done, in proportion to the degree in which we have dwelt on the deepest. We have been gathering the surface-water instead of going right down to the green sand, to which the artesian well must be sunk if the stream is to come up without pumping or wasting. So I say that a deeper reason than the sorrow and darkness of the heathen is—‘the love of Christ constraineth me’; but yet the first is a legitimate one. Only remember this, that Bishop Butler taught us long ago, that if you excite emotions which are intended to lead to action, and the action does not follow, the excitation of the emotion without its appropriate action makes the heart a great deal harder than it was before. That is why it is playing with edged tools to speak so much to our Christian audiences, as we sometimes hear done, about the condition of the heathen as a stimulus to missionary work. If a man does not respond and do something, some crust of callousness and coldness comes over his own heart. You cannot indulge in the luxury of emotion which you do not use to drive your spindles, without doing yourselves harm. It is never intended to be blown off as waste steam and allowed to vanish

into the air. It is meant to be conserved and guided, and to have something done with it. Therefore beware of sentimental contemplation of the sad condition of the shepherdless sheep which does not move you to do anything to help them.

One word more. Take my text as a guide to the form of action into which we are to cast the emotions that should spring from this gaze upon the world. I will only name three points. Christ opened His mouth and spake to them, and taught them many things; Christ said to His disciples, 'Pray ye the Lord of the harvest'; and Christ sent out His apostles to preach the Kingdom. These three things in their bearing upon us are—personal work, prayer, help to send forth Christ's messengers. There is nothing like personal work for making a man understand and feel the miseries of his fellows. Christian men and women, it is your first business everywhere to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ, and no prayers and no subscriptions absolve you from that. In this army a man cannot buy himself off and send in a substitute at the cost of an annual guinea. If Christ sent the apostles, do you hold up the hands of the apostles' successors, and so by God's grace you and I may help on the coming of that blessed day when there shall be one flock and one Shepherd, and when 'the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne'—for the Shepherd is Himself a lamb—'shall feed them and lead them, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.'

THE OBSCURE APOSTLES

‘These twelve Jesus sent forth.’—MATT. x. 5.

AND half of ‘these twelve’ are never heard of as doing any work for Christ. Peter and James and John we know; the other James and Judas have possibly left us short letters; Matthew gives us a Gospel; and of all the rest no trace is left. Some of them are never so much as named again, except in the list at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles; and none of them except the three who ‘seemed to be pillars’ appear to have been of much importance in the early diffusion of the Gospel.

There are many instructive and interesting points in reference to the Apostolate. The number of twelve, in obvious allusion to the tribes of Israel, proclaims the eternal certainty of the divine promises to His people, and the dignity of the New Testament Church as their true heir. The ties of relationship which knit so many of the apostles together, the order of the names varying, but within certain limits, in the different catalogues, the uncultivated provincial rudeness of most of them, would all afford material for important reflections. But, perhaps, not the least important fact about the Apostolate is that one to which we have referred, which like the names of countries on the map, escapes notice because it is ‘writ’ so ‘large’—namely, the small place which the apostles as a body fill in the subsequent narrative, and the entire oblivion into which so many of them pass from the moment of their appointment.

It is to that fact that we wish to turn attention now.

It may suggest some considerations worth pondering, and among other things, may help to show the exaggeration of the functions of the office by the opposite extremes of priests and rationalists. The one school makes it the depository of exclusive supernatural powers; the other regards it as a master-stroke of organisation, to which the early rapid growth of Christianity was largely due. The facts seem to show that it was neither.

I. The first thought which this peculiar and unexpected silence suggests is of the True Worker in the Church's progress.

The way in which the New Testament drops these apostles is of a piece with the whole tone of the Bible. Throughout, men are introduced into its narratives and allowed to slip out with well-marked indifference. Nowhere do we get more vivid, penetrating portraiture, but nowhere do we see such carelessness about following the fortunes or completing the biographies even of those who have filled the largest space in its pages.

Recall, for example, the way in which the New Testament deals with 'the very chiefest' apostles, the illustrious triad of Peter, James, and John. The first escapes from prison; we see him hammering at Mary's door in the grey of the morning, and after brief, eager talk with his friends he vanishes to hide in 'another place,' and is no more heard of, except for a moment in the great council, held in Jerusalem, about the admission of Gentiles to the Church. The second of the three is killed off in a parenthesis. The third is only seen twice in the Book of the Acts, as a silent companion of Peter at a miracle and before the Sanhedrim. Remember how Paul is left in his own hired

house, within sight of trial and sentence, and neither the original writer of the book nor any later hand thought it worth while to add three lines to tell the world what became of him. A strange way to write history, and a most imperfect narrative, surely! Yes, unless there be some peculiarity in the purpose of the book, which explains this cold-blooded, inartistic, and tantalising habit of letting men leap upon the stage as if they had dropped from the clouds, and vanish from it as abruptly as if they had fallen through a trap-door.

Such a peculiarity there is. One of the three to whom we have referred has explained it in the words with which he closes his gospel, words which might stand for the motto of the whole book, 'These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Son of God.' The true purpose is not to speak of men except in so far as they 'bore witness to that light' and were illuminated for a moment by contact with Him. From the beginning the true 'Hero' of the Bible is God; its theme is His self-revelation culminating for evermore in the Man Jesus. All other men interest the writers only as they are subsidiary or antagonistic to that revelation. As long as that breath blows through them they are music; else they are but common reeds. Men are nothing except as instruments and organs of God. He is all, and His whole fulness is in Jesus Christ. Christ is the sole worker in the progress of His Church. That is the teaching of all the New Testament. The thought is expressed in the deepest, simplest form in His own unapproachable words, unfathomable as they are in their depth of meaning, and inexhaustible in their power to strengthen and to cheer: 'I am the vine, ye are the branches, without Me ye can do nothing.' It

shapes the whole treatment of the history of the so-called 'Acts of the Apostles,' which by its very first sentence proclaims itself to be the Acts of the ascended Jesus, 'the former treatise' being declared to have had for its subject 'all that Jesus *began* to do and teach' while on earth, and this treatise being manifestly the continuance of the same theme, and the record of the heavenly activity of the Lord. So the thought runs through all the book: 'The help that is done on earth, He does it all Himself.'

So let us think of Him and of His relation to us as well as to that early Church. His continuous energy is pouring down on us if we will accept it. *In us, for us, by us* He works. 'My Father worketh hitherto, said He when here, 'and I work'; and now, exalted on high, He has passed into that divine repose, which is at the same time the most energetic divine activity. He is all in all to His people. He is all their strength, wisdom, and righteousness. They are but the clouds irradiated by the sun and bathed in its brightness; He is the light which flames in their grey mist and turns it to a glory. They are but the belts and cranks and wheels; He is the power. They are but the channel, muddy and dry; He is the flashing life that fills it and makes it a joy. They are the body; He is the soul dwelling in every part to save it from corruption and give movement and warmth.

'Thou art the organ, whose full breath is thunder;
I am the keys, beneath thy fingers pressed.'

If this be true, how it should deliver us from all overestimate of men, to which our human affections and our feeble faith tempt us so sorely! There *is* One man, and One man only, whose biography is a 'Gospel,'

who owes nothing to circumstances, and who originates the power which He wields; One who is a new beginning, and has changed the whole current of human history, One to whom we are right to bring offerings of the gold, and incense, and myrrh of our hearts, and wills, and minds, which it is blasphemy and degradation to lay at the feet of any others. We may utterly love, trust, and obey Jesus Christ. We dare not do so to any other. The inscription written over the whole book, that it may be transcribed on our whole nature, is, 'No man any more save Jesus only.'

If this thought be true, what confidence it ought to give us as we think of the tasks and fortunes of the Church! If we think only of the difficulties and of the enormous work before us, so disproportioned to our weak powers, we shall be disposed to agree with our enemies, who talk as if Christianity was on the point of perishing, as they have been doing ever since it began. But the outlook is wonderfully different when we take Christ into the account. We are very apt to leave Him out of the reckoning. But one man with Christ to back him is always in the majority. He flings his sword clashing into one scale, and it weighs down all that is in the other. The walls are very lofty and strong, and the besiegers few and weak, badly armed, and quite unfit for the assault; but if we lift our eyes high enough, we, too, shall see a man with a drawn sword over against us, and our hearts may leap up in assured confidence of victory as we recognise in Him the Captain of the Lord's Host, who has already overcome, and will make us valiant in fight and more than conquerors.

When conscious of our own weakness, and tempted

to think of our task as heavy, or when complacent in our own power, and tempted to regard our task as easy, let us think of His ever-present work in and for His people, till it braces us for all duty, and rebukes our easy-going idleness. Surely from that thought of the active, ascended Christ may come to many of His slothful followers the pleading question, as from His own lips, 'Dost thou not care that thou hast left me to serve alone?' Surely to us all it should bring inspiration and strength, courage and confidence, deliverance from man, and elevation above the reverence of blind impersonal forces. Surely we may all lay to heart the grand lesson that union with Him is our only strength, and oblivion of ourselves our highest wisdom. Surely he has best learned his true place and the worth of Jesus Christ, who abides with unmoved humility at His feet, and, like the lonely, lowly forerunner, puts away all temptations to self-assertion while joyfully accepting it as the law of his life to

'Fade in the light of the planet he loves,
To fade in his light and to die.'

Blessed is he who is glad to say, 'He must increase, I must decrease!'

II. This same silence of Scripture as to so many of the apostles may be taken as suggesting what the real work of these delegated workers was.

It certainly seems very strange that, if they were the possessors of such extraordinary powers as the theory of Apostolic Succession implies, we should hear so little of these in the narratives. The silence of Scripture about them goes a long way to discredit such ideas, while it is entirely accordant with a more modest view of the apostolic office.

What was an apostle's function during the life of

Christ? One of the evangelists divides it into three portions: to be with Jesus; to preach the kingdom; to cast out devils and to heal. There is nothing in these offices peculiar to them. The seventy had miraculous powers too, and some at least were our Lord's companions and preachers of His kingdom who were simple disciples. What was an apostle's function after the resurrection? Peter's words, on proposing the election of a new apostle, lay down the duty as simply 'to bear witness' of that resurrection. They were not supernatural channels of mysterious grace, not lords over God's heritage, not even leaders of the Church, but bearers of a testimony to the great historical fact, on the acceptance of which all belief in an historical Christ depended then and depends now. Each of the greater of the apostles is penetrated with the same thought. Paul disclaims anything beside in his 'Not I, but the grace of God in me.' Peter thrusts the question at the staring crowd, 'Why look ye on us as though by *our* power or holiness *we* had made this man to walk?' John, in his calm way, tells his children at Ephesus, 'Ye need not that any man teach you.'

Such an idea of the apostolic office is far more reasonable and accordant with Scripture than a figment about unexampled powers and authority in the Church. It accounts for the qualifications as stated in the same address of Peter's, which merely secure the validity of their testimony. The one thing that *must* be found in an apostle was that he should have been in familiar intercourse with Christ during his earthly life, both before and after His resurrection, in order that he might be able to say, 'I knew Him well; I know that He died; I know that He rose again; I saw Him go up to heaven.' For such a work there was no need for

men of commanding power. Plain, simple, honest men who had the requisite eye-witness were sufficient. The guidance and the missionary work of the Church need not necessarily be in their hands, and, in fact, does not seem to have been. In harmony with this view of the office and its requisites, we find that Paul rests the validity of his apostolate on the fact that 'He was seen of me also,' and regards that vision as his true appointment which left him not 'one whit behind the very chiefest apostles.' Miraculous gifts indeed they had, and miraculous gifts they imparted; but in both instances others shared these powers with them. It was no apostle who laid his hands on the blinded Saul in that house in Damascus and said, 'Receive the Holy Ghost.' An apostle stood by passive and wondering when the Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius and his comrades. In reality apostolic succession is absurd, because there is nothing to succeed to, except what cannot be transmitted, personal knowledge of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To establish that fact as indubitable history is to lay the foundation of the Christian Church, and the eleven plain men, who did that, need no superstitious mist around them to magnify their greatness.

In so far as any succession to them or any devolution of their office is possible, all Christian men inherit it, for to bear witness of the living power of the risen Lord is still the office and honour of every believing soul. It is still true that the sharpest weapon which any man can wield for Christ is the simple adducing of his own personal experience. 'That which we have seen and handled we declare' is still the best form into which our preaching can be cast. And such a voice every man and woman who has found the sweetness

and the power of Christ filling their own souls, is bound—rather let us say, is privileged—to lift up. ‘This honour have all the saints.’ Christ is the true worker, and all our work is but to proclaim Him, and what He has done and is doing for ourselves and for all men.

III. We may gather, too, the lesson of how often faithful work is unrecorded and forgotten.

No doubt those apostles who have no place in the history toiled honestly and did their Lord’s commands, and oblivion has swallowed it all. Bartholomew and ‘Lebbæus, whose surname was Thaddæus,’ and the rest of them, have no place in the record, and their obscure work is faded, faithful and good as certainly it was.

So it will be sooner or later with us all. For most of us, our service has to be unnoticed and unknown, and the memory of our poor work will live perhaps for a year or two in the hearts of some few who loved us, but will fade wholly when they follow us into the silent land. Well, be it so; we shall sleep none the less sweetly, though none be talking about us over our heads. The world has a short memory, and, as the years go on, the list that it has to remember grows so crowded that it is harder and harder to find room to write a new name on it, or to read the old. The letters on the tombstones are soon erased by the feet that tramp across the churchyard. All that matters very little. The notoriety of our work is of no consequence. The earnestness and accuracy with which we strike our blow is all-important; but it matters nothing how far it echoes. It is not the heaven of heavens to be talked about, nor does a man’s life consist in the abundance of newspaper or other paragraphs about him. ‘The love of fame’ is, no doubt, sometimes found in ‘minds’ otherwise ‘noble,’ but in itself is very much

the reverse of noble. We shall do our work best, and be saved from much festering anxiety which corrupts our purest service and fevers our serenest thoughts, if we once fairly make up our minds to working unnoticed and unknown, and determine that, whether our post be a conspicuous or an obscure one, we shall fill it to the utmost of our power—careless of praise or censure, because our judgment is with our God; careless whether we are unknown or well known, because we are known altogether to Him.

The magnitude of our work in men's eyes is as little important as the noise of it. Christ gave all the apostles their tasks—to some of them to found the Gentile churches, to some of them to leave to all generations precious teaching, to some of them none of these things. What then? Were the Peters and the Johns more highly favoured than the others? Was their work greater in His sight? Not so. To Him all service done from the same motive is the same, and His measure of excellence is the quantity of love and spiritual force in our deeds, not the width of the area over which they spread. An estuary that goes wandering over miles of shallows may have less water in it, and may creep more languidly, than the torrent that thunders through some narrow gorge. The deeds that stand highest on the records in heaven are not those which we vulgarly call great. Many 'a cup of cold water only' will be found to have been rated higher there than jewelled golden chalices brimming with rare wines. God's treasures, where He keeps His children's gifts, will be like many a mother's secret store of relics of her children, full of things of no value, what the world calls 'trash,' but precious in His eyes for the love's sake that was in them.

All service which is done from the same motive and with the same spirit is of the same worth in His eyes. It does not matter whether you have the gospel in a penny Testament printed on thin paper with black ink and done up in cloth, or in an illuminated missal glowing in gold and colour, painted with loving care on fair parchment, and bound in jewelled ivory. And so it matters little about the material or the scale on which we express our devotion and our aspirations; all depends on what we copy, not on the size of the canvas on which, or on the material in which, we copy it. 'Small service is true service while it lasts,' and the unnoticed insignificant servants may do work every whit as good and noble as the most widely known, to whom have been intrusted by Christ tasks that mould the ages.

IV. Finally, we may add that forgotten work is remembered, and unrecorded names are recorded above.

The names of these almost anonymous apostles have no place in the records of the advancement of the Church or of the development of Christian doctrine. They drop out of the narrative after the list in the first chapter of the Acts. But we do hear of them once more. In that last vision of the great city which the seer beheld descending from God, we read that in its 'foundations were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.' All were graven there—the inconspicuous names carved on no record of earth, as well as the familiar ones cut deep in the rock to be seen of all men for ever. At the least that grand image may tell us that when the perfect state of the Church is realised, the work which these men did when their testimony laid its foundation, will be for ever associated with their

names. Unrecorded on earth, they are written in heaven.

The forgotten work and its workers are remembered by Christ. His faithful heart and all-seeing eye keep them ever in view. The world, and the Church whom these humble men helped, may forget, yet He will not forget. From whatever muster-roll of benefactors and helpers their names may be absent, they will be in His list. The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Philippians, has a saying in which his delicate courtesy is beautifully conspicuous, where he half apologises for not sending his greetings 'to others my fellow-workers' by name, and reminds them that, however their names may be unwritten in his letter, they have been inscribed by a mightier hand on a better page, and 'are in the Lamb's book of life.' It matters very little from what record ours may be absent so long as they are found there. Let us rejoice that, though we may live obscure and die forgotten, we may have our names written on the breastplate of our High Priest as He stands in the Holy Place, the breastplate which lies close to His heart of love, and is girded to His arm of power.

The forgotten and unrecorded work lives, too, in the great whole. The fruit of our labour may perhaps not be separable from that of others, any more than the sowers can go into the reaped harvest-field and identify the gathered ears which have sprung from the seed that they sowed, but it is there all the same; and whosoever may be unable to pick out each man's share in the blessed total outcome, the Lord of the harvest knows, and His accurate proportionment of individual reward to individual service will not mar the companionship in the general gladness, when 'he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.'

The forgotten work will live, too, in blessed results to the doers. Whatever of recognition and honour we may miss here, we cannot be robbed of the blessing to ourselves, in the perpetual influence on our own character, of every piece of faithful even if imperfect service. Habits are formed, emotions deepened, principles confirmed, capacities enlarged by every deed done for Christ, and these make an over-measure of reward here, and in their perfect form hereafter are heaven. Nothing done for Him is ever wasted. 'Thou shalt find it after many days.' We are all writing our lives' histories here, as if with one of these 'manifold writers'—a black blank page beneath the flimsy sheet on which we write, but presently the black page will be taken away, and the writing will stand out plain on the page behind that we did not see. Life is the filmy, unsubstantial page on which our pen rests; the black page is death; and the page beneath is that indelible transcript of our earthly actions, which we shall find waiting for us to read, with shame and confusion of face, or with humble joy, in another world.

Then let us do our work for Christ, not much careful whether it be greater or smaller, obscure or conspicuous; assured that whoever forgets us and it, He will remember, and however our names may be unrecorded on earth, they will be written in heaven, and confessed by Him before His Father and the holy angels.

CHRIST'S CHARGE TO HIS HERALDS

'These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. 8. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. 9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, 10. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. 11. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy: and there abide till ye go thence. 12. And when ye come into an house, salute it. 13. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. 15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city. 16. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.'—MATT. x. 5-16.

THE letter of these instructions to the apostles has been abrogated by Christ, both in reference to the scope of, and the equipment for, their mission (Matt. xxviii. 19; Luke xxii. 36). The spirit of them remains as the perpetual obligation of all Christian workers, and every Christian should belong to that class. Some direct evangelistic work ought to be done by every believer, and in doing it he will find no better directory than this charge to the apostles.

I. We have, first, the apostles' mission in its sphere and manner (vs. 5-8). They are told where to go and what to do there. Mark that the negative prohibition precedes the positive injunction, as if the apostles were already so imbued with the spirit of universalism that they would probably have overpassed the bounds which for the present were needful. The restriction was transient. It continued in the line of divine limitation of the sphere of Revelation which confined itself to the Jew, in order that through him it might reach the world. That method could not be abandoned till the Jew himself had destroyed it by rejecting Christ.

Jesus still clung to it. Even when the commission was widened to 'all the world,' Paul went 'to the Jew first,' till he too was taught by uniform failure that Israel was fixed in unbelief.

How tenderly our Lord designates the nation as 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel'! He is still influenced by that compassion which the sight of the multitudes had moved in Him (chap. ix. 36). Lost indeed, wandering with torn fleece, and lying panting, in ignorance of their pasture and their Shepherd, they are yet 'sheep,' and they belong to that chosen seed, sprung from so venerable ancestors, and heirs of so glorious promises. Clear sight of, and infinite pity for, men's miseries, must underlie all apostolic effort.

The work to be done is twofold—a glad truth is to be proclaimed, gracious deeds of power are to be done. How blessed must be the kingdom, the forerunners of which are miracles of healing and life-giving! If the heralds can do these, what will not the King be able to do? If such hues attend the dawn, how radiant will be the noontide! Note 'as ye go,' indicating that they were travelling evangelists, and were to speak as they went, and go when they had spoken. The road was to be their pulpit, and each man they met their audience. What a different world it would be if Christians carried their message with them so!

'Freely ye have received'; namely, in the first application of the words, the message of the coming kingdom and the power to work miracles. But the force of the injunction, as applied to us, is even more soul-subduing, as our gift is greater, and the freedom of its bestowal should evoke deeper gratitude. The deepest springs of the heart's love are set flowing by the undeserved, un-

purchased gift of God, which contains in itself both the most tender and mighty motive for self-forgetting labour, and the pattern for Christian service. How can one who has received that gift keep it to himself? How can he sell what he got for nothing? 'Freely give'—the precept forbids the seeking of personal profit or advantage from preaching the gospel, and so makes a sharp test of our motives; and it also forbids clogging the gift with non-essential conditions, and so makes a sharp test of our methods.

II. The prohibition to make gain out of the message, serves as a transition to the directions as to equipment. The apostles were to go as they stood; for the command is, '*Get you no gold,*' etc. It has been already noted that these prohibitions were abrogated by Jesus in view of His departure, and the world-wide mission of the Church. But the spirit of them is not abrogated. Note that the descending value of the metals named makes an ascending stringency in the prohibition. Not even copper money is to be taken. The 'wallet' was a leather satchel or bag, used by shepherds and others to carry a little food; sustenance, then, was also to be left uncared for. Dress, too, was to be limited to that in wear; no change of inner robe nor a spare pair of shoes was to encumber them, nor even a spare staff. If any of them had one in his hand, he was to take it (Mark vi. 8). The command was meant to lift the apostles above suspicion, to make them manifestly disinterested, to free them from anxiety about earthly things, that their message might absorb their thoughts and efforts, and to give room for the display of Christ's power to provide. It had a promise wrapped in it. He who forbade them to provide for themselves thereby pledged Himself to take care of them. 'The labourer

is worthy of his food.' They may be sure of subsistence, and are not to wish for more.

All this has a distinct bearing on modern church arrangements. On the one hand, it vindicates the right of those who preach the gospel to live of the gospel, and sets any payments to them on the right footing, as not being charity or generosity, but the discharge of a debt. On the other hand, it enjoins on preachers and others who are paid for service not to serve for pay, not to be covetous of large remuneration, and to take care that no taint of greed for money shall mar their work, but that their conduct may confirm their words when they say with Paul, 'We seek not yours, but you.'

III. The conduct required from, and the reception met with by, the messengers come next. Christ first enjoins discretion and discrimination of character, so far as possible. The messenger of the kingdom is not to be mixed up with disreputable people, lest the message should suffer. The principle of his choice of a home is to be, not position, comfort, or the like, but 'worthiness'; that is, predisposition to receive the message. However poor the chamber in the house of such, there is the apostle to settle himself. 'If ye have judged me to be faithful, come into my house,' said Lydia. The less Christ's messengers are at home with Christ's neglecters, the calmer their own hearts, and the more potent their message. They give the lie to it, if they voluntarily choose as their associates those to whom their dearest convictions are idle. Christian charity does not blind to distinctions of character. A little common sense in reading these will save many a scandal, and much weakening of influence.

Christian earnestness does not abolish courtesy. The

message is not to be blurted out in defiance of even conventional forms. Zeal for the Lord is no excuse for rude abruptness. But the salutation of the true apostle will deepen the meaning of such forms, and make the conventional the real expression of real goodwill. No man should say 'Peace be unto you' so heartily as Christ's servant. The servant's benediction will bring the Master's ratification; for Jesus says, '*Let your peace come upon it,*' as if commanding the good which we can only wish. That will be so, if the requisite condition is fulfilled. There must be soil for the seed to root in.

But no true wish for others' good—still more, no effort for it—is ever void of blessed issue. If the peace does not rest on a house into which jarring and sin forbid its entrance, it will not be homeless, but come back, like the dove to the ark, and fold its wings in the heart of the sender. The reflex influence of Christian effort is precious, whatever its direct results are. How the Church has been benefited by its missionary enterprises!

Jesus encouraged no illusions in His servants as to their success. From the beginning they were led to expect that some would receive and some would reject their words. In this rapid preparatory mission, there was no time for long delay anywhere; but for us, it is not wise to conclude that patient effort will fail because first appeals have not succeeded. Much close communion with Jesus, not a little self-suppression, and abundant practical wisdom, are needed to determine the point at which further efforts are vain. No doubt, there is often great waste of strength in trying to impress unimpressible people, or to revive some moribund enterprise; but it is a pardonable weakness to be reluctant to abandon a field. Still it *is* a weakness, and there come times when the only right thing to do is to

'shake off the dust' of the messenger's feet in token that all connection is ended, and that he is clear from the blood of the rejecters. The awful doom of such is solemnly introduced by 'Verily, I say unto you.' It rests on the plain principle that the measure of light is the measure of criminality, and hence the measure of punishment. The rejecters of Christ among us are as much more guilty than 'that city' as its inhabitants were than the men of Sodom.

The first section of this charge properly ends with verse 15, the following verse being a transition to the second part. The Greek puts strong emphasis on 'I.' It is He who sends among wolves, therefore He will protect. A strange thing for a shepherd to do! A strange encouragement for the apostles on the threshold of their work! But the words would often come back to them when beset by the pack with their white teeth gleaming, and their howls filling the night. They are not promised that they will not be torn, but they are assured that, even if they are, the Shepherd wills it, and will not lose one of His flock.

What is the Christian defence? Prudence like the serpent's, but not the serpent's craft or malice; harmlessness like the dove's, but not without the other safeguard of 'wisdom.' The combination is a rare one, and the surest way to possess it is to live so close to Jesus that we shall be progressively changed into His likeness. Then our prudence will never degenerate into cunning, nor our simplicity become blindness to dangers. The Christian armour and arms are meek, unconquerable patience, and Christ-likeness. To resist is to be beaten; to endure unretaliating is to be victorious. 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.'

THE WIDENED MISSION, ITS PERILS AND DEFENCES

'Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 17. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; 18. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. 19. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. 20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. 21. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. 22. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. 23. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come. 24. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. 25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? 26. Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. 27. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. 28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.'—MATT. x. 16-31.

WE have already had two instances of Matthew's way of bringing together sayings and incidents of a like kind without regard to their original connection. The Sermon on the Mount and the series of miracles in chapters viii. and ix. are groups, the elements of which are for the most part found disconnected in Mark and Luke. This charge to the twelve in chapter x. seems to present a third instance, and to pass over in verse 16 to a wider mission than that of the twelve during our Lord's lifetime, for it forebodes persecution, whereas the preceding verses opened no darker prospect than that of indifference or non-reception. The 'city' which, in that stage of the gospel message, simply would 'not receive you nor hear your words,' in this stage has worsened into one where 'they persecute you,' and the persecutors are

now 'kings' and 'Gentiles,' as well as Jewish councils and synagogue-frequenters. The period covered in these verses, too, reaches to the 'end,' the final revelation of all hidden things.

Obviously, then, our Lord is looking down a far future, and giving a charge to the dim crowd of His later disciples, whom His prescient eye saw pressing behind the twelve in days to come. He had no dreams of swift success, but realised the long, hard fight to which He was summoning His disciples. And His frankness in telling them the worst that they had to expect was as suggestive as was His freedom from the rosy, groundless visions of at once capturing a world which enthusiasts are apt to cherish, till hard experience shatters the illusions. He knew the future in store for Himself, for His Gospel, for His disciples. And He knew that dangers and death itself will not appal a soul that is touched into heroic self-forgetfulness by His love. 'Set down my name,' says the man in *Pilgrim's Progress*, though he knew—may we not say, because he knew?—that the enemies were outside waiting to fall on him.

A further difference between this and the preceding section is, that there the stress was laid on the contents of the disciples' message, but that here it is laid on their sufferings. Not so much by what they say, as by how they endure, are they to testify. 'The noble army of martyrs praise Thee,' and the primitive Church preached Jesus most effectually by dying for Him.

The keynote is struck in verse 16, in which are to be noted the 'Behold,' which introduces something important and strange, and calls for close attention; the majestic '*I send you,*' which moves to obedience

whatever the issues, and pledges Him to defend the poor men who are going on His errands and the pathetic picture of the little flock huddled together, while the gleaming teeth of the wolves gnash all round them. A strange theme to drape in a metaphor! but does not the very metaphor help to lighten the darkness of the picture, as well as speak of His calmness, while He contemplates it? If the Shepherd sends His sheep into the midst of wolves, surely He will come to their help, and surely any peril is more courageously faced when they can say to themselves, 'He put us here.' The sheep has no claws to wound with nor teeth to tear with, but the defenceless Christian has a defence, and in his very weaponlessness wields the sharpest two-edged sword. 'Force from force must ever flow.' Resistance is a mistake. The victorious antagonist of savage enmity is patient meekness. 'Sufferance is the badge of all' true servants of Jesus. Wherever they have been misguided enough to depart from Christ's law of endurance and to give blow for blow, they have lost their cause in the long run, and have hurt their own Christian life more than their enemies' bodies. Guilelessness and harmlessness are their weapons. But 'be ye wise as serpents' is equally imperative with 'guileless as doves.' Mark the fine sanity of that injunction, which not only permits but enjoins prudent self-preservation, so long as it does not stoop to crooked policy, and is saved from that by dove-like guilelessness. A difficult combination, but a possible one, and when realised, a beautiful one!

The following verses (17-22) expand the preceding, and mingle in a very remarkable way plain predictions of persecution to the death and encouragements

to front the worst. Jewish councils and synagogues, Gentile governors and kings, will unite for once in common hatred, than which there is no stronger bond. That is a grim prospect to set before a handful of Galilean peasants, but two little words turn its terror into joy; it is 'for My sake,' and that is enough. Jesus trusted His humble friends, as He trusts all such always, and believed that 'for My sake' was a talisman which would sweeten the bitterest cup and would make cowards into heroes, and send men and women to their deaths triumphant. And history has proved that He did not trust them too much. 'For His sake'—is that a charm for *us*, which makes the crooked straight and the rough places plain, which nerves for suffering and impels to noble acts, which moulds life and takes the sting and the terror out of death? Nor is that the only encouragement given to the twelve, who might well be appalled at the prospect of standing before Gentile kings. Jesus seems to discern how they shrank as they listened, at the thought of having to bear 'testimony' before exalted personages, and, with beautiful adaptation to their weakness, He interjects a great promise, which, for the first time, presents the divine Spirit as dwelling in the disciples' spirits. The occasion of the dawning of that great Christian thought is very noteworthy, and not less so is the designation of the Spirit as 'of your Father,' with all the implications of paternal care and love which that name carries. Special crises bring special helps, and the martyrologies of all ages and lands, from Stephen outside the city wall to the last Chinese woman, have attested the faithfulness of the Promiser. How often have some calm, simple words from some slave girl in Roman cities, or some ignorant

confessor before inquisitors, been manifestly touched with heavenly light and power, and silenced sophistries and threats!

The solemn foretelling of persecution, broken for a moment, goes on and becomes even more foreboding, for it speaks of dearest ones turned to foes, and the sweet sanctities of family ties dissolved by the solvent of the new Faith. There is no enemy like a brother estranged, and it is tragically significant that it is in connection with the rupture of family bonds that death is first mentioned as the price that Christ's messengers would have to pay for faithfulness to their message. But the prediction springs at a bound, as it were, from the narrow circle of home to the widest range, and does not fear to spread before the eyes of the twelve that they will become the objects of hatred to the whole human race if they are true to Christ's charge. The picture is dark enough, and it has turned out to be a true forecast of facts. It suggests two questions. What right had Jesus to send men out on such an errand, and to bid them gladly die for Him? And what made these men gladly take up the burden which He laid on them? He has the right to dispose of us, because He is the Son of God who has died for us. Otherwise He is not entitled to say to us, Do my bidding, even if it leads you to death. His servants find their inspiration to absolute, unconditional self-surrender in the Love that has died for them. That which gives Him His right to dispose of us in life and death gives us the disposition to yield ourselves wholly to Him, to be His apostles according to our opportunities, and to say, 'Whether I live or die, I am the Lord's.'

That thought of world-wide hatred is soothed by

the recurrence of the talisman, 'For My name's sake,' and by a moment's showing of a fair prospect behind the gloom streaked with lightning in the foreground. 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved.' The same saying occurs in chapter xxiv. 13, in connection with the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem, and in the same connection in Mark xiii. 13, in both of which places several other sayings which appear in this charge to the apostles are found. It is impossible to settle which is the original place for these, or whether they were twice spoken. The latter supposition is very unfashionable at present, but has perhaps more to say for itself than modern critics are willing to allow. But Luke (xxi. 19) has a remarkable variation of the saying, for his version of it is, 'In your patience, ye shall win your souls.' His word 'patience' is a noun cognate with the verb rendered in Matthew and Mark 'endureth,' and to 'win one's soul' is obviously synonymous with being 'saved.' The saying cannot be limited, in any of its forms, to a mere securing of earthly life, for in this context it plainly includes those who have been delivered to death by parents and brethren, but who by death have won their lives, and have been, as Paul expected to be, thereby 'saved into His heavenly kingdom.' To the Christian, death is the usher who introduces him into the presence-chamber of the King, and he that loseth his life 'for My name's sake,' finds it glorified in, and into, life eternal.

But willingness to endure the utmost is to be accompanied with willingness to take all worthy means to escape it. There has been a certain unwholesome craving for martyrdom generated in times of persecution, which may appear noble but is very wasteful.

The worst use that you can put a man to is to burn him, and a living witness may do more for Christ than a dead martyr. Christian heroism may be shown in not being afraid to flee quite as much as in courting, or passively awaiting, danger. And Christ's Name will be spread when His lovers are hounded from one city to another, just as it was when 'they that were scattered abroad, went everywhere, preaching the word.' When the brands are kicked apart by the heel of violence, they kindle flames where they fall.

But the reason for this command to flee is perplexing. 'Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.' Is Jesus here reverting to the narrower immediate mission of the apostles? What 'coming' is referred to? We have seen that the first mission of the twelve was the theme of verses 5-15, and was there pursued to its ultimate consequences of final judgment on rejecters, whilst the wider horizon of a future mission opens out from verse 16 onwards. A renewed contraction of the horizon is extremely unlikely. It would be as if 'a flower should shut and be a bud again.' The recurrence in verse 23 of 'Verily I say unto you,' which has already occurred in verse 15, closing the first section of the charge, makes it probable that here too a section is completed, and that probability is strengthened if it is observed that the same phrase occurs, for a third time, in the last verse of the chapter, where again the discourse soars to the height of contemplating the final reward. The fact that the apostles met with no persecution on their first mission, puts out of court the explanation of the words that refers them to that mission, and takes the

'coming' to be Jesus' own appearances in the places where they had preceded Him as His heralds. The difficult question as to what is the *terminus ad quem* pointed to here seems best solved by taking the 'coming of the Son of Man' to be His judicial manifestation in the destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent desolation of many of 'the cities of Israel,' whilst at the same time, the nearer and smaller catastrophe is a prophecy and symbol of the remoter and greater 'day of the Son of Man' at the end of the days. The recognition of that aspect of the fall of Jerusalem is forced on us by the eschatological parts of the Gospels, which are a bewildering whirl without it. Here, however, it is the crash of the fall itself which is in view, and the thought conveyed is that there would be cities enough to serve for refuges, and scope enough for evangelistic work, till the end of the Jewish possession of the land.

In verses 26-31, 'fear not' is thrice spoken, and at each occurrence is enforced by a reason. The first of these encouragements is the assurance of the certain ultimate world-wide manifestation of hidden things. That same dictum occurs in other connections, and with other applications, but in the present context can only be taken as an assurance that the Gospel message, little known as it thus far was, was destined to fill all ears. Therefore the disciples were to be fearless in doing their part in making it known, and so working in alliance with the divine purpose. It is the same thing that is meant by the 'covered' that 'shall be revealed,' the 'hidden' that 'shall be known,' 'that which is spoken in darkness,' and 'that which is whispered in the ear'; and all four designations refer to the word which every Christian has it in charge

to sound out. We note that Jesus foresees a far wider range of publicity for His servants' ministry than for His own, just as He afterwards declared that they would do 'greater works' than His. He spoke to a handful of men in an obscure corner of the world. His teaching was necessarily largely confidential communication to the fit few. But the spark is going to be a blaze, and the whisper to become a shout that fills the world. Surely, then, we who are working in the line of direction of God's working should let no fear make us dumb, but should ever hear and obey the command: 'Lift up thy voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid.'

A second reason for fearlessness is the limitation of the enemy's power to hurt, reinforced by the thought that, while the penalties that man can inflict for faithfulness are only corporeal, transitory, and incapable of harming the true self, the consequences of unfaithfulness fling the whole man, body and soul, down to utter ruin. There is a fear that makes cowards and apostates; there is a fear which makes heroes and apostles. He who fears God, with the awe that has no torment and is own sister to love, is afraid of nothing and of no man. That holy and blessed fear drives out all other, as fire draws the heat out of a burn. He that serves Christ is lord of the world; he that fears God fronts the world, and is not afraid.

The last reason for fearlessness touches a tender chord, and discloses a gracious thought of God as Father, which softens the tremendous preceding word: 'Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.' Take both designations together, and let them work together in producing the awe which makes us brave, and the filial trust which makes us

braver. A bird does not 'fall to the ground' unless wounded, and if it falls it dies. Jesus had looked pityingly on the great mystery, the woes of the creatures, and had stayed Himself on the thought of the all-embracing working of God. The very dying sparrow, with broken wing, had its place in that universal care. God is 'immanent' in nature. The antithesis often drawn between His universal care and His 'special providence' is misleading. Providence is special because it is universal. That which embraces everything must embrace each thing. But the immanent God is 'your Father,' and because of that sonship, 'ye are of more value than many sparrows.' There is an ascending order, and an increasing closeness and tenderness of relation. 'A man is better than a sheep,' and Christians, being God's children, may count on getting closer into the Father's heart than the poor crippled bird can, or than the godless man can. 'Your Father,' on the one hand, can destroy soul and body, therefore fear Him; but, on the other, He determines whether you shall 'fall to the ground' or soar above dangers, therefore fear none but Him.

LIKE TEACHER, LIKE SCHOLAR

'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. 25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.'—
MATT. x. 24, 25.

THESE words were often on Christ's lips. Like other teachers, He too had His favourite sayings, the light of which He was wont to flash into many dark places. Such a saying, for instance, was, 'To him that hath shall be given.' Such a saying is this of my text; and

probably several other of our Lord's utterances, which are repeated more than once in different Gospels, and have too hastily been sometimes assumed to have been introduced erroneously by the evangelists, in varying connections.

This half-proverb occurs four times in the Gospels, and in three very different connections, pointing to three different subjects. Here, and once in John's Gospel, in the fifteenth chapter, it is employed to enforce the lesson of the oneness of Christ and His disciples in their relation to the world; and that His servants cannot expect to be better off than the Master was. 'If they have called Me Beelzebub they will not call you anything else.'

Then in Luke's Gospel (vi. 40) it is employed to illustrate the principle that the scholar cannot expect to be wiser than his master; that a blind teacher will have blind pupils, and that they will both fall into the ditch. Of course, the scholar may get beyond his master, but then he will get up and go away from the school, and will not be his scholar any longer. As long as he is a scholar, the best that can happen to him, and that will not often happen, is to be on the level of his teacher.

Then in another place in John's Gospel (xiii. 16) the saying is employed in reference to a different subject, viz. to teach the meaning of the pathetic, symbolical foot-washing, and to enforce the exhortation to imitate Jesus Christ, as generally in conduct, so specially in His wondrous humility. 'The servant is not greater than his lord.' 'I have left you an example that ye should do as I have done to you.'

So if we put these three instances together we get a threefold illustration of the relation between the

disciple and the teacher, in respect to wisdom, conduct, and reception by the world. And these three, with their bearing on the relation between Christians and Jesus Christ, open out large fields of duty and of privilege. The very centre of Christianity is discipleship, and the very highest hope, as well as the most imperative command which the Gospel brings to men is, 'Be like Him whom you profess to have taken as your Master. Be like Him here, and you shall be like Him hereafter.'

I. Likeness to the teacher in wisdom is the disciple's perfection.

'If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch.' 'The disciple is not greater than his master.' 'It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master.' If that be a true principle, that the best that can happen to the scholar is to tread in his teacher's footsteps, to see with his eyes, to absorb his wisdom, to learn his truth, we may apply it in two opposite directions. First, it teaches us the limitations, and the misery, and the folly of taking men for our masters; and then, on the other hand, it teaches us the large hope, the blessing, freedom, and joy of having Christ for our Master.

Now, first, look at the principle as bearing upon the relation of disciple and human teacher. All such teachers have their limitations. Each man has his little circle of favourite ideas that he is perpetually reiterating. In fact, it seems as if one truth was about as much as one teacher could manage, and as if, whenever God had any great truth to give to the world, He had to take one man and make him its sole apostle. So that teachers become mere fragments, and to listen to them is to dwarf and narrow oneself.

The chances are that no scholar shall be on his master's level. The eyes that see truth directly and for themselves in this world are very few. Most men have to take truth at second-hand, and few indeed are they who, like a perfect medium, receive even the fragmentary truth that human lips can impart to them, and transmit it as pure as they receive it. Disciples present exaggerations, caricatures, misconceptions, the limitations of the master becoming even more rigid in the pupil. Schools spring up which push the founder's teaching to extremes, and draw conclusions from it which he never dreamed of. Instead of a fresh voice, we have echoes, which, like all echoes, give only a syllable or two out of a sentence. Teachers can tell what they see, but they cannot give their followers eyes, and so the followers can do little more than repeat what their leader said he saw. They are like the little suckers that spring up from the 'stool' of a cut-down tree, or like the kinglets among whose feebler hands the great empire of an Alexander was divided at his death.

It is a dwarfing thing to call any man master upon earth. And yet men will give to a man the credence which they refuse to Christ. The followers of some of the fashionable teachers of to-day—Comte, Spencer, or others—protest, in the name of mental independence, against accepting Christ as the absolute teacher of morals and religion, and then go away and put a man in the very place which they have denied to Him, and swallow down his *dicta* whole.

Such facts show how heart and mind crave a teacher; how discipleship is ingrained in our nature; how we all long for some one who shall come to us authoritatively and say, 'Here is truth—believe it and live on it.'

And yet it is fatal to pin one's faith on any, and it is miserable to have to change guides perpetually and to feel that we have outgrown those whom we reverence, and that we can look down on the height which once seemed to touch the stars—and, if we cut ourselves loose from all men's teaching, the isolation is dreary, and few of us are strong enough of arm, or clear enough of eye, to force or find the path through the tangled jungles of error.

So take this thought, that the highest hope of a disciple is to be like the master in wisdom, in its bearing on the relation between us and Christ, and look how it then flashes up into blessedness and beauty.

Such a teacher as we have in Him has no limitations, and it is safe to follow Him absolutely and Him alone. All others have plainly borne the impress of their age, or their nation, or their idiosyncrasy, in some way or another; Christ Jesus is the only teacher that the world has ever heard of, in whose teaching there is no mark of the age or generation or set of circumstances in which it originated. This water does not taste of any soil through which it has passed, it has come straight down from Heaven, and is pure and uncontaminated as the Heaven from which it has come. This teacher is safe to listen to absolutely: there are no limitations there; you never hear Him arguing; there is no sign about His words as if He had ever dug out for Himself the wisdom that He is proclaiming, or had ever seen it less distinctly than He sees it at the moment. The great peculiarity of His teaching is that He does not reason, but declares that His 'Verily! Verily!' is the confirmation of all His message. His teaching is Himself; other men bring lessons about truth; He says, 'I am the Truth.' Other teachers keep their personality

in the background; He clashes His down in the foreground. Other men say, 'Listen to what I tell you, never mind about me.' He says, 'This is life eternal, that ye should believe on Me.' This Teacher has His message level to all minds, high and low, wise and foolish, cultivated and rude. This Teacher does not only impart wisdom by words as from without, though He does that too, but He comes into men's spirits, and communicates Himself, and so makes them wise. Other teachers fumble at the outside, but 'in the hidden parts He makes me to know wisdom.' So it is safe to take this Teacher absolutely, and to say, 'Thou art my Master, Thy word is truth, and the opening of Thy lips to me is wisdom.'

In following Christ as our absolute Teacher, there is no sacrifice of independence or freedom of mind, but listening to Him is the way to secure these in their highest degree. We are set free from men, we are growingly delivered from errors and misconceptions, in the measure in which we keep close to Christ as our Master. The Lord is that Teacher, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there, and there only, is liberty; freedom from self, from the dominion of popular opinion, from the coterie-speech of schools, from the imposing authority of individuals, and from all that makes cowardly men say as other people say, and fall in with the majority; and freedom from our own prejudices and our own errors, which are cleared away when we take Christ for our Master and cleave to Him.

His teaching can never cease until it has accomplished its purpose, and not until we have gathered into our consciousness all the truth that He has to give, and have received all the wisdom that He can impart

unto us as to God and Himself, does His teaching cease. Here we may grow indefinitely in the knowledge of Christ, and in the future we shall know even as we are known. His merciful teaching will not come to a close till we have drunk in all His wisdom, and till He has declared to us all which He has heard of the Father. He will pass us from one form to another of His school, but in Heaven we shall still be His scholars; 'Every one shall sit at Thy feet, every one shall receive of Thy words.'

So, then, let us turn away from men, from rabbis and Sanhedrins, from authorities and schools, from doctors and churches. Why resort to cisterns when we may draw from the spring? Why listen to men when we may hear Christ? He is, as Dante called the great Greek thinker, 'the Master of those who know.' Why should we look to the planets when we can see the sun? 'Call no man master upon earth, for One is your Master, and all ye are brethren.' And His merciful teaching will never cease until 'every one that is perfected shall be as his Master.'

II. Now, turn to the second application of this principle. Likeness to the Master in life is the law of a disciple's conduct.

That pathetic and wonderful story about the foot-washing in John's Gospel is meant for a symbol. It is the presenting, in a picturesque form, of the very heart and essence of Christ's Incarnation in its motive and purpose. The solemn prelude with which the evangelist introduces it lays bare our Lord's heart and His reason for His action. 'Having loved His own, which were in the world, He loved them to the end.' His motive, then, was love. Again, the exalted consciousness which accompanied His self-abasement is

made prominent in the words, 'Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand, and that He was come from God and went to God.' And the majestic deliberation and patient continuance in resolved humility with which He goes down the successive steps of the descent, are wonderfully given in the evangelist's record of how He 'riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments and girded Himself, and poured water into the basin.' It is a parable. Thus, in the consciousness of His divine authority and dignity, and moved by His love to the whole world, He laid aside the garments of His glory, and vested Himself with the towel of His humanity, the servant's garb, and took the water of His cleansing power, and came to wash the feet of all who will let Him cleanse them from their soil. And then, having reassumed His garments, He speaks from His throne to those who have been cleansed by His humiliation and His sacrifice, 'Know ye what I have done to you? The servant is not greater than his lord.'

That is to say, dear brethren, in this one incident, which is the condensation, so to speak, of the whole spirit of His life, is the law for our lives as well. We, too, are bound to that same love as the main motive of all our actions; we, too, are bound to that same stripping off of dignity and lowly equalising of ourselves with those below us whom we would help, and we, too, are bound to make it our main object, in our intercourse with men, not merely that we should please nor enlighten them, nor succour their lower temporal needs, but that we should cleanse them and make them pure with the purity that Christ gives.

A Christian life all moved and animated by self-denuding love, and which came amongst men to make

them better and purer, and all the influence of which tended in the direction of helping poor foul hearts to get rid of their filth, how different it would be from our lives! What a grim contrast much of our lives is to the Master's example and command! Did you ever strip yourself of anything, my brother, in order to make some poor, wretched creature a little purer and liker the Saviour? Did you ever drop your dignity and go down to the low levels in order to lift up the people that were there? Do men see anything of that example, as reproduced in your lives, of the Master that lays aside the garments of Heaven for the vesture of earth, and dies upon the Cross in order that He might make our poor hearts purer and liker His own?

But, hard as such imitation is, it is only one case of a general principle. Discipleship is likeness to Jesus Christ in conduct. There is no discipleship worth naming which does not, at least, attempt that likeness. What is the use of a man saying that he is the disciple of Incarnate Love if his whole life is incarnate selfishness? What is the use of your calling yourselves Christians, and saying that you are followers of Jesus Christ, when He came to do God's will and delighted in it, and you come to do your own, and never do God's will at all, or scarcely at all, and then reluctantly and with many a murmur? What kind of a disciple is he, the habitual tenor of whose life contradicts the life of his Master and disobeys His commandments? And I am bound to say that that is the life of an enormously large proportion of the professing disciples in this age of conventional Christianity.

'The disciple shall be as his master.' Do you make it your effort to be like Him? If so, then the saying is not only a law, but a promise, for it assures us that

our effort shall not fail but progressively succeed, and lead on at last to our becoming what we behold, and being conformed to Him whom we love, and like the Master to whose wisdom we profess to listen. They whose earthly life is a following of Christ, with faltering steps and afar off, shall have for their heavenly blessedness, that they shall 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

III. And now, lastly, likeness to the Master in relation to the world is the fate that the disciple must put up with.

'If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?' 'The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.' Our Lord reiterated the statement in another place in John's Gospel, reminding them that He had said it before.

If we are like Jesus Christ in conduct, and if we have received His Word as the truth upon which we repose, depend upon it, in our measure and in varying fashions, we shall have to bear the same kind of treatment that He received from the world. The days of so-called persecution are over in so-called Christian countries, but if you are a disciple in the sense of believing all that Jesus Christ says, and taking Him for your Teacher, the public opinion of this day will have a great many things to say about you that will not be very pleasant. You will be considered to be 'old-fashioned,' 'narrow,' 'behind the times,' etc. etc. etc. Look at the bitter spirit of antagonism to an earnest and simple Christianity and adoption of Christ as our authoritative Teacher which goes through much of our high-class literature to-day. It is a very small matter as measured with what Christian men used to have to

bear; but it indicates the set of things. We may make up our minds that if we are not contented with the pared-down Christianity which the world allows to pass at present, but insist upon coming to the New Testament for our beliefs and practices, and avow—‘I believe all that Jesus Christ says, and I believe it because He says it, and I take Him as my model’; we shall find out that the disciple has to be ‘as his Master,’ and that the Pharisees and the Scribes of to-day stand in the same relation to the followers as their predecessors did to the Leader. If you are like your Master in conduct, you will be no more popular with the world than He was. As long as Christianity will be quiet, and let the world go its own gait, the world is very well contented to let it alone, or even to say polite things to it. Why should the world take the trouble of persecuting the kind of Christianity that so many of us display? What is the difference between our Christianity and their worldliness? The world is quite willing to come to church on Sundays, and to call itself a Christian world, if only it may live as it likes. And many professing Christians have precisely the same idea. They attend to the externals of Christianity, and call themselves Christians, but they bargain for its having very little power over their lives. Why, then, should two sets of people who have the same ideas and practices dislike each other? No reason at all! But let Christian men live up to their profession, and above all let them become aggressive, and try to attack the world’s evil, as they are bound to do; let them fight drunkenness, let them go against the lust of great cities, let them preach peace in the ace of a nation howling for war, let them apply the golden rules of Christianity to commerce and social

relationships and the like, and you will very soon hear a pretty shout that will tell you that the disciple who is a disciple has to share the fate of the Master, notwithstanding nineteen centuries of Christian teaching.

If you do not know what it is to find yourselves out of harmony with the world, I am afraid it is because you have less of the Master's spirit than you have of the world's. The world loves its own. If you are not 'of the world, the world will hate you.' If it does not, it must be because, in spite of your name, you belong to it.

But if we are like Him in our relation to the world, because we are like Him in character, our very share in 'His reproach,' and our sense of being 'aliens' here, bear the promise that we shall be like Him in all worlds. His fortune is ours. 'The disciple shall be as his master.' If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. No cross, no crown;—if cross, then crown! The end of discipleship is not reached until the Master's image and the Master's lot are repeated in the scholar.

Take Christ for your sacrifice, trust to His blood, listen to His teaching, walk in His footsteps, and you shall share His sovereignty and sit on His throne. 'It is enough,'—ay! more than enough, and nothing less than that is enough,—'for the disciple that he be *as*'—and *with*—'his master.' 'I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness.'

THE KING'S CHARGE TO HIS AMBASSADORS

'Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. 33. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. 34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36. And

a man's foes shall be they of his own household. 37. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. 39. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it. 40. He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me. 41. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.'—MATT. x. 32-42.

THE first mission of the apostles, important as it was, was but a short flight to try the young birds' wings. The larger portion of this charge to them passes far beyond the immediate occasion, and deals with the permanent relations of Christ's servants to the world in which they live, for the purpose of bringing it into subjection to its true King. These solemn closing words, which make our present subject, contain the duty and blessedness of confessing Him, the vision of the antagonisms which He excites, His demand for all-surrendering following, and the rewards of those who receive Christ's messengers, and therein receive Himself and His Father.

I. The duty and blessedness of confessing Him (vs. 32, 33). The 'therefore' is significant. It attaches the promise which follows to the immediately preceding thoughts of a watchful, fatherly care, extending like a great invisible hand over the true disciple. Because each is thus guarded, each shall be preserved to receive the honour of being confessed by Christ. No matter what may befall His witnesses, the extremest disaster shall not rob them of their reward. They may be flung down from the house-tops where they lift up their bold voices, but He who does not let a sparrow fall to the ground uncared for, will give His angels charge concerning them who are so much more precious, and they shall be borne up on out-

stretched wings, lest they be dashed on the pavement below. Thus preserved, they shall all attain at last to their guerdon. Nothing can come between Christ's servant and his crown. The tender providence of the Father, whose mercy is over all His works, makes sure of that. The river of the confessor's life may plunge underground, and be lost amid persecutions, but it will emerge again into the brighter sunshine on the other side of the mountains.

The confession which is to be thus rewarded, like the denial opposed to it, is, of course, not merely a single utterance of the lip. So far Judas Iscariot confessed Christ, and Peter denied Him. But it is the habitual acknowledgment by lip and life, unwithdrawn to the end. The context implies that the confession is maintained in the face of opposition, and that the denial is a cowardly attempt to save one's skin at the cost of treason to Jesus. The temptation does not come in that sharpest form to us. Perhaps some cowards would be made brave if it did. It is perhaps easier to face the gibbet and the fire, and screw oneself up for once to a brief endurance, than to resist the more specious blandishments of the world, especially when it has been christened, and calls itself religious. The light laugh of scorn, the silent pressure of the low average of Christian character, the close associations in trade, literature, public and domestic life which Christians have with non-Christians, make many a man's tongue lie silent, to the sore detriment of his own religious life. 'Ye have not yet resisted unto 'lood,' and find it hard to fulfil the easier conflict to be
me.
tha. which you are called. The sun has more power than
35. 1
again the tempest to make the pilgrim drop his garment. Every
the duty remains the same for all ages. Every

man is bound to make the deepest springs of his life visible, and to stand to his convictions, whatever they be. If he do not, his convictions will disappear like a piece of ice hid in a hot hand, which will melt and trickle away. This obligation lies with infinitely increased weight on Christ's servants; and the consequences of failing to discharge it are more tragic in their cases, in the exact proportion of the greater preciousness of their faith. Corn hoarded is sure to be spoiled by weevils and rust. The bread of life hidden in our sacks will certainly go mouldy.

The reward and punishment of confession and denial come to them not as separate acts, but as each being the revelation of the spiritual condition of the doers. Christ implies that a true disciple cannot but be a confessor, and that therefore the denier must certainly be one whom He has never known. Because, therefore, each act is symptomatic of the doer, each receives the congruous and correspondent reward. The confessor is confessed; the denier is denied. What calm and assured consciousness of His place as Judge underlies these words! His recognition is God's acceptance; His denial is darkness and misery. The correspondence between the work and the reward is beautifully brought out by the use of the same word to express each. And yet what a difference between our confession of Him and His of us! And what a hope is here for all who have tremblingly, and in the consciousness of much unworthiness, ventured to say that they were Christ's subjects, and He their King, brother, and all! Their poor, feeble confession will be endorsed by His. He will say, 'Yes, this man is mine, and I am his.' That will be glory, honour, blessedness, life, heaven.

II. The vision of the discord which follows the

coming of the King of peace. It is not enough to interpret these words as meaning that our Lord's purpose indeed was to bring peace, but that the result of His coming was strife. The ultimate purpose is peace; but an immediate purpose is conflict, as the only road to the peace. He is first King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace. But, if His kingdom be righteousness, purity, love, then unrighteousness, filthiness, and selfishness will fight against it for their lives. The ultimate purpose of Christ's coming is to transform the world into the likeness of heaven; and all in the world which hates such likeness is embattled against Him. He saw realities, and knew men's hearts, and was under no illusion, such as many an ardent reformer has cherished, that the fair form of truth need only be shown to men, and they will take her to their hearts. Incessant struggle is the law for the individual and for society till Christ's purpose for both is realised.

That conflict ranges the dearest in opposite ranks. The gospel is the great solvent. As when a substance is brought into contact with some chemical compound, which has greater affinity for one of its elements than the other element has, the old combination is dissolved, and a new and more stable one is formed, so Christianity analyses and destroys in order to synthesis and construction. In verse 21 our Lord had foretold that brother should deliver up brother to death. Here the severance is considered from the opposite side. The persons who are 'set at variance' with their kindred are here Christians. Perhaps it is fanciful to observe that they are all junior members of families, as if the young would be more likely to flock to the new light. But however that may be, the

separation is mutual, but the hate is all on one side. The 'man's foes' are of his own household; but he is not their foe, though he be parted from them.

III. Earthly love may be a worse foe to a true Christian than even the enmity of the dearest; and that enmity may often be excited by the Christian subordination of earthly to heavenly love. So our Lord passes from the warnings of discord and hate to the danger of the opposite—undue love.

He claims absolute supremacy in our hearts. He goes still farther, and claims the surrender, not only of affections, but of self and life to Him. What a strange claim this is! A Jewish peasant, dead nineteen hundred years since, fronts the whole race of man, and asserts His right to their love, which is strange, and to their supreme love, which is stranger still. Why should we love Him at all, if He were only a man, however pure and benevolent? We may admire, as we do many another fair nature in the past; but is there any possibility of evoking anything as warm as love to an unseen person, who can have had no knowledge of or love to us? And why should we love Him more than our dearest, from whom we have drawn, or to whom we have given, life? What explanation or justification does He give of this unexampled demand? Absolutely none. He seems to think that its reasonableness needs no elucidation. Surely never did teacher professing wisdom, modesty, and, still more, religion, put forward such a claim of right; and surely never besides did any succeed in persuading generations unborn to yield His demand, when they heard it. The strangest thing in the world's history is that to-day there are millions who do love Jesus Christ more than all besides, and whose

chief self-accusation is that they do not love Him more. The strange, audacious claim is most reasonable, if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who died for each of us, and that each man and woman to the last of the generations had a separate place in His divine human love when He died. It is meet to love Him, if that be true; it is not, unless it be. The requirement is as stringent as strange. If the two ever seem to conflict, the earthly must give way. If the earthly be withdrawn, there must be found sufficiency for comfort and peace in the heavenly. The lower must not be permitted to hinder the flight of the heavenly to its home. 'More than Me' is a rebuke to most of us. What a contrast between the warmth of our earthly and the tepidity or coldness of our heavenly love! How spontaneously our thoughts, when left free, turn to the one; how hard we find it to keep them fixed on the other! How sweet service is to the dear ones here; how reluctantly it is given to Christ! How we long, when parted, to rejoin them; how little we are drawn to the place where He is! We have all to confess that we are 'not worthy of' Him; that we requite His love with inadequate returns, and live lives which tax His love for its highest exercise, the free forgiveness of sins against itself. Compliance with that stringent law, and subordinating all earthly love to His, is the true elevating and ennobling of the earthly. It is promoted, not degraded, when it is made second, and is infinitely sweeter and deeper than when it was set in the place of supremacy, where it had no right to be.

But Christ's demand is not only for the surrender of the heart, but for the giving up of self, and, in a very profound sense, for the surrender of life. How

enigmatical that saying about taking up the cross must have sounded to the disciples! They knew little about the cross, as a punishment; they had not yet associated it in any way with their Lord. This seems to have been the first occasion of His mentioning it, and the allusion is so veiled as to be but partially intelligible. But what was intelligible was bewildering. A strange royal procession that, of the King with a cross on His shoulder, and all His subjects behind Him with similar burdens! Through the ages that procession has marched, and it marches still. Self-denial for Christ's sake is 'the badge of all our tribe.' Observe that word 'take.' The cross must be willingly and by ourselves assumed. No other can lay it on our shoulders. Observe that other word 'his.' Each man has his own special form in which self-denial is needful for him. We require pure eyes, and hearts kept in very close communion with Jesus, to ascertain what our particular cross is. He has them of many patterns, shapes, sizes, and materials. We can always make sure of strength to carry the one which He means us to carry, but not of strength to bear what is not ours.

IV. We have the rewards of those who receive Christ's messengers, and therein receive Him and His Father. Our Lord first identifies these twelve with Himself in a manner which must have sounded strange to them then, but have heartened them for their work by the consciousness of His mysterious oneness with them. The whole doctrine of Christ's unity with His people lay in germ in these words, though much more was needed, both of teaching and of experience, before their depth of blessing and strengthening could be apprehended. *We* know that He dwells in His true

subjects by His Spirit, and that a most real union subsists between the head and the members, of which the closest unions of earth are but faint shadows, so as that not only those who receive His followers receive Him, but, more wonderful still, His followers are received at the last by God Himself as joined to Him, and portions of His very self, and therefore 'accepted in the Beloved.' Our Lord adds to these words the thought that, in like manner, to receive Him is to receive the Father, and so implies that our relation to Him is in certain real respects parallel with His relation to the Father. We too are sent. He who sends abides with us, as the Son ever abode in God, and God in Him. We are sent to be the brightness of Christ's glory, and to manifest Him to men, as He was sent to reveal the Father.

A LIFE LOST AND FOUND¹

'He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.'—MATT. X. 39.

MY heart impels me to break this morning my usual rule of avoiding personal references in the pulpit. Death has been busy in our own congregation this last week, and yesterday we laid in the grave all that was mortal of a man to whom Manchester owes more than it knows. Mr. Crossley has been for thirty years my close and dear friend. He was long a member of this church and congregation. I need not speak of his utter unselfishness, of his lifelong consecration, of his lavish generosity, of his unstinted work for God and man; but thinking of him and of it, I have felt as if the words of my text were the secret of his life, and as if very

¹ Preached after the funeral of Mr. F. W. Crossley.

he now understood the fulness of the promise they contain: 'He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.' Now, looking at these words in the light of the example so tenderly beloved by some of us, so sharply criticised by many, but now so fully recognised as saintly by all, I ask you to consider—

I. The stringent requirement for the Christian life that is here made.

Now we shall very much impoverish the meaning and narrow the sweep of these great and penetrating words, if we understand by 'losing one's life' only the actual surrender of physical existence. It is not only the martyr on whose bleeding brows the crown of life is gently placed; it is not only the temples that have been torn by the crown of thorns, that are soothed by that unfading wreath; but there is a daily dying, which is continually required from all Christian people, and is, perhaps, as hard as, or harder than, the brief and bloody passage of martyrdom by which some enter into rest. For the true losing of life is the slaying of self, and that has to be done day by day, and not once for all, in some supreme act of surrender at the end, or in some initial act of submission and yielding at the beginning, of the Christian life. We ourselves have to take the knife into our own hands and strike, and that not once, but ever, right on through our whole career. For, by natural disposition, we are all inclined to make our own selves to be our own centres, our own aims, the objects of our trust, our own law; and if we do so, we are dead whilst we live, and the death that brings life is when, day by day, we 'crucify the old man with his affections and lusts.' Crucifixion was no sudden death; it was an exquisitely painful one, which made every nerve quiver and the whole

frame thrill with anguish; and that slow agony, in all its terribleness and protractedness, is the image that is set before us as the true ideal of every life that would not be a living death. The world is to be crucified to me, and I to the world.

We have our centre in ourselves, and we need the centre to be shifted, or we live in sin. If I might venture upon so violent an image, the comets that career about the heavens need to be caught and tamed, and bound to peaceful revolution round some central sun, or else they are 'wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.' So, brethren, the slaying of self by a painful, protracted process, is the requirement of Christ.

But do not let us confine ourselves to generalities. What is meant? This is meant—the absolute submission of the will to commandments and providences, the making of that obstinate part of our nature meek and obedient and plastic as the clay in the potter's hands. The tanner takes a stiff hide, and soaks it in bitter waters, and dresses it with sharp tools, and lubricates it with unguents, and his work is not done till all the stiffness is out of it and it is flexible. And we do not lose our lives in the lofty, noble sense, until we can say—and verify the speech by our actions—'Not my will but Thine be done.' They who thus submit, they who thus welcome into their hearts, and enthrone upon the sovereign seat in their wills, Christ and His will—these are they who have lost their lives. When we can say, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,' then, and only then, have we in the deepest sense of the words 'lost our lives.'

The phrase means the suppression, and sometimes the excision, of appetites, passions, desires, inclina-

tions. It means the hallowing of all aims; it means the devotion and the consecration of all activities. It means the surrender and the stewardship of all possessions. And only then, when we have done these things, shall we have come to practical obedience to the initial requirement that Christ makes from us all—to lose our lives for His sake.

I need not diverge here to point to that life from which my thoughts have taken their start in this sermon. Surely if there was any one characteristic in it more distinct and lovely than another, it was that self was dead and that Christ lived. There may be sometimes a call for the actual—which is the lesser—surrender of the bodily life, in obedience to the call of duty. There have been Christian men who have wrought themselves to death in the Master's service. Perhaps he of whom I have been speaking was one of these. It may be that, if he had done like so many of our wealthy men—had flung himself into business and then collapsed into repose—he would have been here to-day. Perhaps it would have been better if there had been a less entire throwing of himself into arduous and clamant duties. I am not going to enter on the ethics of that question. I do not think there are many of this generation of Christians who are likely to work themselves to death in Christ's cause; and perhaps, after all, the old saying is a true one, 'Better to wear out than to rust out.' But only this I will say: we honour the martyrs of Science, of Commerce, of Empire, why should not we honour the martyrs of Faith? And why should they be branded as imprudent enthusiasts, if they make the same sacrifice which, when an explorer or a soldier makes, his memory is honoured as heroic, and his cold brows are

crowned with laurels? Surely it is as wise to die for Christ as for England. But be that as it may, the requirement, the stringent requirement, of my text is not addressed to any spiritual aristocracy, but is laid upon the consciences of all professing Christians.

II. Observe the grounds of this requirement.

Did you ever think—or has the fact become so familiar to you that it ceases to attract notice?—did you ever think what an extraordinary position it is for the son of a carpenter in Nazareth to plant Himself before the human race and say, ‘You will be wise if you die for My sake, and you will be doing nothing more than your plain duty’? What business has He to assume such a position as that? What warrants that autocratic and all-demanding tone from His lips? ‘Who art Thou’—we may fancy people saying—‘that Thou shouldst put out a masterful hand and claim to take as Thine the life of my heart?’ Ah! brethren, there is but one answer: ‘Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.’ The foolish, loving, impulsive apostle that blurted out, before his time had come, ‘I will lay down my life for Thy sake,’ was only premature; he was not mistaken. There needed that His Lord should lay down His life for Peter’s sake; and then He had a right to turn to the apostle and say, ‘Thou shalt follow Me afterwards,’ and ‘lay down thy life for My sake.’ The ground of Christ’s unique claim is Christ’s solitary sacrifice. He who has died for men, and He only, has the right to require the unconditional, the absolute surrender of themselves, not only in the sacrifice of a life that is submitted, but, if circumstances demand, in the sacrifice of a death. The ground of the requirement is laid, first in the fact of our

Lord's divine nature, and second, in the fact that He who asks my life has first of all given His.

But that same phrase, 'for My sake,' suggests—

III. The all-sufficient motive which makes such a loss of life possible.

I suppose that there is nothing else that will wholly dethrone self but the enthroning of Jesus Christ. That dominion is too deeply rooted to be abolished by any enthusiasms, however noble they may be, except the one that kindles its undying torch at the flame of Christ's own love. God forbid that I should deny that wonderful and lovely instances of self-oblivion may be found in hearts untouched by the supreme love of Christ! But whilst I recognise all the beauty of such, I, for my part, humbly venture to believe and assert that, for the entire deliverance of a man from self-regard, the one sufficient motive power is the reception into his opening heart of the love of Jesus Christ.

Ah! brethren, you and I know how hard it is to escape from the tyrannous dominion of self, and how the evil spirits that have taken possession of us mock at all lesser charms than the name which 'devils fear and fly'; 'the Name that is above every name.' We have tried other motives. We have sought to reprove our selfishness by other considerations. Human love—which itself is sometimes only the love of self, seeking satisfaction from another—human love does conquer it, but yet conquers it partially. The demons turn round upon all other would-be exorcists, and say, 'Jesus we know . . . but who are ye?' It is only when the Ark is carried into the Temple that Dagon falls prone before it. If you would drive self out of your hearts—and if you do not it will slay you—if you

would drive self out, let Christ's love and sacrifice come in. And then, what no brooms and brushes, no spades nor wheelbarrows, will ever do—namely, cleanse out the filth that lodges there—the turning of the river in will do, and float it all away. The one possibility for complete, conclusive deliverance from the dominion and tyranny of Self is to be found in the words 'For My sake.' Ah! brethren, I suppose there are none of us so poor in earthly love, possessed or remembered, but that we know the omnipotence of these words when whispered by beloved lips, 'For My sake'; and Jesus Christ is saying them to us all.

IV. Lastly, notice the recompense of the stringent requirement.

'Shall find it,' and that finding, like the losing, has a twofold reference and accomplishment: here and now, yonder and then.

Here and now, no man possesses himself till he has given himself to Jesus Christ. Only then, when we put the reins into His hands, can we coerce and guide the fiery steeds of passion and of impulse. And so Scripture, in more than one place, uses a remarkable expression, when it speaks of those that believe to the 'acquiring of their souls.' You are not your own masters until you are Christ's servants; and when you fancy yourselves to be most entirely your own masters, you have promised yourselves liberty and have become the slave of corruption. So if you would own yourselves, give yourselves away. And such an one 'shall find' his life, here and now, in that all earthly things will be sweeter and better. The altar sanctifies the gift. When some pebble is plunged into a sunlit stream, the water brings out the veined colourings of the stone that looked all dull and dim when it was lying upon the bank. Fling

your whole being, your wealth, your activities, and everything, into that stream, and they will flash in splendour else unknown. Did not my friend, of whom I have been speaking, enjoy his wealth far more, when he poured it out like water upon good causes, than if he had spent it in luxury and self-indulgence? And shall we not find that everything is sweeter, nobler, better, fuller of capacity to delight, if we give it all to our Master? The stringent requirement of Christ is the perfection of prudence. 'Who pleasure follows pleasure slays,' and who slays pleasure finds a deeper and a holier delight. The keenest epicureanism could devise no better means for sucking the last drop of sweetness out of the clustering grapes of the gladnesses of earth than to obey this stringent requirement, and so realise the blessed promise, 'Whoso loseth his life for My sake shall find it.' The selfish man is a roundabout fool. The self-devoted man, the Christ-enthroning man, is the wise man.

And there will be the further finding hereafter, about which we cannot speak. Only remember, how in a passage parallel with this of my text, spoken when almost within sight of Calvary, our Lord laid down not only the principle of His own life but the principle for all His servants, when He said, 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.' The solitary grain dropped into the furrow brings forth a waving harvest. We may not, we need not, particularise, but the life that is found at last is as the fruit an hundredfold of the life that men called 'lost' and God called 'sown.'

'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.'

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM, AND THEIR REWARD

'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.'—MATT. x. 41, 42.

THERE is nothing in these words to show whether they refer to the present or to the future. We shall probably not go wrong if we regard them as having reference to both. For all godliness has 'promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come,' and '*in* keeping God's commandments,' as well as *for* keeping them, 'there is great reward,' a reward realised in the present, even although Death holds the keys of the treasure-house in which the richest rewards are stored. No act of holy obedience is here left without foretastes of joy, which, though they be but 'brooks by the way,' contain the same water of life which hereafter swells to an ocean.

Some people tell us that it is defective morality in Christianity to bribe men to be good by promising them Heaven, and that he who is actuated by such a motive is selfish. Now that fantastic and overstrained objection may be very simply answered by two considerations: self-regard is not selfishness, and Christianity does not propose the future reward as the motive for goodness. The motive for goodness is love to Jesus Christ; and if ever there was a man who did acts of Christian goodness only for the sake of what he would get by them, the acts were not Christian goodness, because the motive was wrong. But it is a piece of fastidiousness to forbid us to reinforce the

great Christian motive, which is love to Jesus Christ, by the thought of the recompense of reward. It is a stimulus and an encouragement of, not the motive for, goodness. This text shows us that it is a subordinate motive, for it says that the reception of a prophet, or of a righteous man, or of 'one of these little ones,' which is rewardable, is the reception 'in the name of' a prophet, a disciple, and so on, or, in other words, is the recognising of the prophet, or the righteous man, or the disciple for what he is, and because he is that, and not because of the reward, receiving him with sympathy and solace and help.

So, with that explanation, let us look at these very remarkable words of our text.

I. The first thing which I wish to observe in them is the three classes of character which are dealt with—'prophet,' 'righteous man,' 'these little ones.'

Now the question that I would suggest is this: Is there any meaning in the order in which these are arranged? If so, what is it? Do we begin at the bottom, or at the top? Have we to do with an ascending or with a descending scale? Is the prophet thought to be greater than the righteous man, or less? Is the righteous man thought to be higher than the little one, or to be lower? The question is an important one, and worth considering.

Now, at first sight, it certainly does look as if we had here to do with a descending scale, as if we began at the top and went downwards. A prophet, a man honoured with a distinct commission from God to declare His will, is, in certain very obvious respects, loftier than a man who is not so honoured, however pure and righteous he may be. The dim and venerable figures, for instance, of Isaiah and Jeremiah,

tower high above all their contemporaries; and the godly men who hung upon their lips, like Baruch on Jeremiah's, felt themselves to be, and were, inferior to them. And, in like manner, the little child who believes in Christ may seem to be insignificant in comparison with the prophet with his God-touched lips, or the righteous man of the old dispensation with his austere purity; as a humble violet may seem by the side of a rose with its heart of fire, or a white lily regal and tall. But one remembers that Jesus Christ Himself declared that 'the least of the little ones' was greater than the greatest who had gone before; and it is not at all likely that He who has just been saying that whosoever received His followers received Himself, should classify these followers beneath the righteous men of old. The Christian type of character is distinctly higher than the Old Testament type; and the humblest believer is blessed above prophets and righteous men because his eyes behold and his heart welcomes the Christ.

Therefore I am inclined to believe that we have here an ascending series—that we begin at the bottom and not at the top; that the prophet is less than the righteous man, and the righteous man less than the little one who believes in Christ. For, suppose there were a prophet who was not righteous, and a righteous man who was not a prophet. Suppose the separation between the two characters were complete, which of them would be the greater? Balaam was a prophet; Balaam was not a righteous man; Balaam was immeasurably inferior to the righteous whose lives he did not emulate, though he could not but envy their deaths. In like manner the humblest believer in Jesus Christ has something that a prophet, if he is not a

disciple, does not possess ; and that which he has, and the prophet has not, is higher than the endowment that is peculiar to the prophet alone.

May we say the same thing about the difference between the righteous man and the disciple? Can there be a righteous man that is not a disciple? Can there be a disciple that is not a righteous man? Can the separation between these two classes be perfect and complete? No! in the profoundest sense, certainly not. But then at the time when Christ spoke there were some men standing round Him, who, 'as touching the righteousness which is of the law,' were 'blameless.' And there are many men to-day, with much that is noble and admirable in their characters, who stand apart from the faith that is in Jesus Christ; and if the separation be so complete as that, then it is to be emphatically and decisively pronounced that, if we have regard to all that a man ought to be, and if we estimate men in the measure in which they approximate to that ideal in their lives and conduct, 'the Christian is the highest style of man.' The disciple is above the righteous men adorned with many graces of character, who, if they are not Christians, have a worm at the root of all their goodness, because it lacks the supreme refinement and consecration of faith; and above the fiery-tongued prophet, if he is not a disciple.

Now, brethren, this thought is full of very important practical inferences. Faith is better than genius. Faith is better than brilliant gifts. Faith is better than large acquirements. The poet's imagination, the philosopher's calm reasoning, the orator's tongue of fire, even the inspiration of men that may have their lips touched to proclaim God to their brethren, are all less than the bond of living trust that knits a soul to

Jesus Christ, and makes it thereby partaker of that indwelling Saviour. And, in like manner, if there be men, as there are, and no doubt some of them among my hearers, adorned with virtues and graces of character, but who have not rested their souls on Jesus Christ, then high above these, too, stands the lowliest person who has set his faith and love on that Saviour. Neither intellectual endowments nor moral character are the highest, but faith in Jesus Christ. A man may be endowed with all brilliancy of intellect and fair with many beauties of character, and he may be lost; and on the other hand simple faith, rudimentary and germlike as it often is, carries in itself the prophecy of all goodness, and knits a man to the source of all blessedness. ‘Whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. Now abideth these three, faith, hope, charity.’ ‘Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven.’

Ah! brethren, if we believed in Christ’s classification of men, and in the order of importance and dignity in which He arranges them, it would make a wonderful practical difference to the lives, to the desires, and to the efforts of a great many of us. Some of you students, young men and women that are working at college or your classes, if you believed that it was better to trust in Jesus Christ than to be wise, and gave one-tenth, ay! one-hundredth part of the attention and the effort to secure the one which you do to secure the other, would be different people. ‘Not many wise men after the flesh,’ but humble trusters in Jesus Christ, are the victors in the world. Believe you that, and order your lives accordingly.

Oh! what a reversal of this world's estimates is coming one day, when the names that stand high in the roll of fame shall pale, like photographs that have been shut up in a portfolio, and when you take them out have faded off the paper. 'The world knows nothing of its greatest men,' but there is a time coming when the spurious mushroom aristocracy that the world has worshipped will be forgotten, like the nobility of some conquered land, who are brushed aside and relegated to private life by the new nobility of the conquerors, and when the true nobles, God's aristocrats, the righteous, who are righteous because they have trusted in Christ, shall shine forth like the sun 'in the Kingdom of My Father.'

Here is the climax: gifts and endowments at the bottom, character and morality in the middle, and at the top faith in Jesus Christ.

II. Now notice briefly in the second place the variety of the reward according to the character.

The prophet has his, the righteous man has his, the little one has his. That is to say, each level of spiritual or moral stature receives its own prize. There is no difficulty in seeing that this is so in regard to the rewards of this life. Every faithful message delivered by a prophet increases that prophet's own blessedness, and has joys in the receiving of it from God, in the speaking of it to men, in the marking of its effects as it spreads through the world, which belong to him alone. In all these, and in many other ways, the 'prophet' has rewards that no stranger can intermeddle with. All courses of obedient conduct have their own appropriate consequences and satisfaction. Every character is adapted to receive, and does receive, in the measure of its goodness, certain blessings and

joys, here and now. 'Surely the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth.'

And the same principle, of course, applies if we think of the reward as altogether future. It must be remembered, however, that Christianity does not teach, as I believe, that if there be a prophet or a righteous man who is not a disciple, that prophet or righteous man will get rewards in the future life. It must be remembered, too, that every disciple is righteous in the measure of his faith. Discipleship being presupposed, then the disciple who is a prophet will have one reward, and the disciple who is a righteous man shall have another; and where all three characteristics coincide, there shall be a triple crown of glory upon his head.

That is all plain and obvious enough, if only we get rid of the prejudice that the rewards of a future life are merely bestowed upon men by God's arbitrary good pleasure. What is the reward of Heaven? 'Eternal life,' people say. Yes! 'Blessedness.' Yes! But where does the life come from, and where does the blessedness come from? They are both derived, they come from God in Christ; and in the deepest sense, and in the only true sense, God is Heaven, and God is the reward of Heaven. 'I am thy shield,' so long as dangers need to be guarded against, and then, thereafter, 'I am thine exceeding great Reward.' It is the possession of God that makes all the Heaven of Heaven, the immortal life which His children receive, and the blessedness with which they are enraptured. We are heirs of immortality, we are heirs of life, we are heirs of blessedness, because, and in the measure in which, we become heirs of God.

And if that be so, then there is no difficulty in seeing

that in Heaven, as on earth, men will get just as much of God as they can hold; and that in Heaven, as on earth, capacity for receiving God is determined by character. The gift is one, the reward is one, and yet the reward is infinitely various. It is the same light which glows in all the stars, but 'star differeth from star in glory.' It is the same wine, the new wine of the Kingdom, that is poured into all the vessels, but the vessels are of divers magnitudes, though each be full to the brim.

And so in those two sister parables of our Master's, which are so remarkably discriminated and so remarkably alike, we have both these aspects of the Heavenly reward set forth—both that which declares its identity in all cases, and the other which declares its variety according to the recipient's character. All the servants receive the same welcome, the same prize, the same entrance into the same joy; although one of them had ten talents, and another five, and another two. But the servants who were each sent out to trade with one poor pound in their hands, and by their varying diligence reaped varying profits, were rewarded according to the returns that they had brought; and one received ten, and the other five, and the other two, cities over which to have authority and rule. So the reward is one, and yet infinitely diverse. It is not the same thing whether a man or a woman, being a Christian, is an earnest, and devoted, and growing Christian here on earth, or a selfish, and an idle, and a stagnant one. It is not the same thing whether you content yourselves with simply laying hold on Christ, and keeping a tremulous and feeble hold of Him for the rest of your lives, or whether you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. There is such a fate

as being saved, yet so as by fire, and going into the brightness with the smell of the fire on your garments. There is such a fate as having just, as it were, squeezed into Heaven, and got there by the skin of your teeth. And there is such a thing as having an abundant entrance ministered, when its portals are thrown wide open. Some imperfect Christians die with but little capacity for possessing God, and therefore their heaven will not be as bright, nor studded with as majestic constellations, as that of others. The starry vault that bends above us so far away, is the same in the number of its stars when gazed on by the savage with his unaided eye, and by the astronomer with the strongest telescope; and the Infinite God, who arches above us, but comes near to us, discloses galaxies of beauty and oceans of abysmal light in Himself, according to the strength and clearness of the eye that looks upon Him. So, brethren, remember that the one glory has in finitedegrees; and faith, and conduct, and character here determine the capacity for God which we shall have when we go to receive our reward.

III. The last point that is here is the substantial identity of the reward to all that stand on the same level, however different may be the form of their lives.

‘He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.’ And so in the case of the others. The active prophet, righteous man, or disciple, and the passive recogniser of each in that character, who receives each as a prophet, or righteous man, or disciple, stand practically and substantially on the same level, though the one of them may have his lips glowing with the divine inspiration and the other may never have opened his mouth for God.

That is beautiful and deep. The power of sympathising with any character is the partial possession of that character for ourselves. A man who is capable of having his soul bowed by the stormy thunder of Beethoven, or lifted to Heaven by the ethereal melody of Mendelssohn, is a musician, though he never composed a bar. The man who recognises and feels the grandeur of the organ music of 'Paradise Lost' has some fibre of a poet in him, though he be but 'a mute, inglorious Milton.'

All sympathy and recognition of character involve some likeness to that character. The poor woman who brought the sticks and prepared food for the prophet entered into the prophet's mission and shared in the prophet's work and reward, though his task was to beard Ahab, and hers was only to bake Elijah's bread. The old knight that clapped Luther on the back when he went into the Diet of Worms, and said to him, 'Well done, little monk!' shared in Luther's victory and in Luther's crown. He that helps a prophet because he is a prophet, has the making of a prophet in himself.

As all work done from the same motive is the same in God's eyes, whatever be the outward shape of it, so the work that involves the same type of spiritual character will involve the same reward. You find the Egyptian medal on the breasts of the soldiers that kept the base of communication as well as on the breasts of the men that stormed the works at Tel-el-Kebir. It was a law in Israel, and it is a law in Heaven: 'As his part is that goeth down into the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff, they shall part alike.' 'I am going down into the pit, you hold the ropes,' said Carey, the pioneer missionary. They that hold the ropes, and the daring miner that

swings away down in the blackness, are one in the work, may be one in the motive, and, if they are, shall be one in the reward. So, brethren, though no coal of fire may be laid upon your lips, if you sympathise with the workers that are trying to serve God, and do what you can to help them, and identify yourself with them, and so hold the ropes, my text will be true about you. 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' They who by reason of circumstances, by deficiency of power, or by the weight of other tasks and duties, can only give silent sympathy, and prayer, and help, are one with the men whom they help.

Dear brethren! remember that this awful, mystical life of ours is full everywhere of consequences that cannot be escaped. What we sow we reap, and we grind it, and we bake it, and we live upon it. We have to drink as we have brewed; we have to lie on the beds that we have made. 'Be not deceived: God is not mocked.' The doctrine of reward has two sides to it. 'Nothing human ever dies.' All our deeds drag after them inevitable consequences; but if you will put your trust in Jesus Christ, He will not deal with you according to your sins, nor reward you according to your iniquities; and the darkest features of the recompense of your evil will all be taken away by the forgiveness which we have in His blood. If you will trust yourselves to Him you will have that eternal life, which is not wages, but a gift; which is not reward, but a free bestowment of God's love. And then, if we build upon that Foundation on which alone men can build their hopes, their thoughts, their characters, their lives, however feeble may be our efforts, however narrow may be our sphere,—though we be neither prophets nor sons of

prophets, and though our righteousness may be all stained and imperfect, yet, to our own amazement and to God's glory, we shall find, when the fire is kindled which reveals and tests our works, that, by the might of humble faith in Christ, we have built upon that Foundation, gold and silver and precious stones; and shall receive the reward given to every man whose work abides that trial by fire.

JOHN'S DOUBTS OF JESUS, AND JESUS' PRAISE OF JOHN

'Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, 3. And said unto Him, Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another? 4. Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: 5. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. 6. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me. 7. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? 8. But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. 9. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. 10. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee. 11. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. 13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. 14. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. 15. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'—MATT. xi. 2-15.

THIS text falls into two parts: the first, from verses 2-6 inclusive, giving us the faltering faith of the great witness, and Christ's gentle treatment of the waverer; the second, from verse 7 to the end, giving the witness of Christ to John, exuberant in recognition, notwithstanding his momentary hesitation.

I. We do not believe that this message of John's was sent for the sake of strengthening his disciples' faith in Jesus as Messiah, nor that it was merely meant as a

tant to Jesus to declare Himself. The question is
 hain's. The answer is sent to him: it is he who is to
 tender the things which the messengers saw, and to
 answer his own question thereby. The note which the
 evangelist prefixes to his account gives the key to the
 incident. John was 'in prison,' in that gloomy fortress
 of Machærus which Herod had rebuilt at once for 'a
 sinful pleasure-house,' and for an impregnable refuge,
 among the savage cliffs of Moab. The halls of luxuri-
 ous vice and the walls of defence are gone; but the
 dungeons are there still, with the holes in the masonry
 into which the bars were fixed to which the prisoners
 —John, perhaps, one of them—were chained. No
 wonder that in the foul atmosphere of a dark dungeon
 the spirit which had been so undaunted in the free air
 of the desert began to flag; nor that even he who had
 seen the fluttering dove descend on Christ's head, and
 had pointed to Him as the Lamb of God, felt that 'all
 his mind was clouded with a doubt.' It would have
 been wiser if commentators, instead of trying to save
 John's credit at the cost of straining the narrative, had
 recognised the psychological truth of the plain story of
 his wavering conviction, and had learned its lessons of
 self-distrust. There is only one Man with whom it was
 always high-water; all others have ebbs and flows in
 their religious life, and variations in their grasp of
 truth.

The narrative further gives the motive for John's
 embassy, in the report which had reached him of 'the
 works of Christ.' We need only recall John's earlier
 testimony to understand how these works would not
 seem to him to fill up the rôle which he had anticipated
 for Messiah. Where is the axe that was to be laid at
 the root of the trees, or the fan that was to winnow out

the chaff? Where is the fiery spirit which he had¹ is told? This gentle Healer is not the theocratic judge of his warning prophecies. He is tending and nurtur²ing, rather than felling, the barren trees. A nimbus of merciful deeds, not of flashing 'wrath to come,' surrounds His head. So John began to wonder if, after all, he had been premature in his recognition. Perhaps this Jesus was but a precursor, as he himself was, of the Messiah. Evidently he continues firm in the conviction of Christ's being sent from God, and is ready to accept His answer as conclusive; but, as evidently, he is puzzled by the contrariety between Jesus' deeds and his own expectations. He asks, 'Art Thou *He that cometh*'—a well-known name for Messiah—'or are we to expect another?' where it should be noted that the word for 'another' means not merely a second, but a different kind of, person, who should present the aspects of the Messiah as revealed in prophecy, and as embodied in John's own preaching, which Jesus had left unfulfilled.

We may well take to heart the lesson of the fluctuations possible to the firmest faith, and pray to be enabled to hold fast that we have. We may learn, too, the danger to right conceptions of Christ, of separating the two elements of mercy and judgment in His character and work. John was right in believing that the Christ must come to judge. A Christ without the fan in His hand is a maimed Christ. John was wrong in stumbling at the gentleness, just as many to-day, who go to the opposite extreme, are wrong in stumbling at the judicial side of His work. Both halves are needed to make the full-orbed character. We have not to 'look for a different' Christ, but we have to look for Him, coming the second time,

the same Jesus, but now with His axe in His pierced hands, to hew down trees which He has patiently tended. Let John's profound sense of the need for a judicial aspect in the Christ who is to meet the prophecies written in men's hearts, as well as in Scripture, teach us how one-sided and superficial are representations of His work which suppress or slur over His future coming to judgment.

Our Lord does not answer 'Yes' or 'No.' To do so might have stilled, but would not have removed, John's misconception. A more thorough cure is needed. So Christ attacks it in its roots by referring him back for answer to the very deeds which had excited his doubt. In doing so, He points to, or indeed, we may say, quotes, two prophetic passages (Isa. xxxv. 5, 6; lxi. 1) which give the prophetic 'notes' of Messiah. It is as if He had said, 'Have you forgotten that the very prophets whose words have fed your hopes, and now seem to minister to your doubts, have said this and this about the Messiah?' Further, there is deep wisdom in sending John back again to think over the very deeds at which he was stumbling. It is not Christ's work which is wanting in conformity to the divine idea; it is John's conceptions of that idea that need enlarging. What he wants is not so much to be told that Jesus is the Christ, as to grow up to a truer, because more comprehensive, notion of what the Christ is to be. A wide principle is taught us here. The very points in Christ's work which may occasion difficulty, will, when we stand at the right point of view, become evidences of His claims. What were stumbling-blocks become stepping-stones. Arguments against become proofs of, the truth when we look at them with clearer eyes, and from the proper angle.

Further, we are taught here, that what Christ does is the best answer to the question as to who He is. Still He is doing these works among us. Darkened eyes are flooded with light by His touch, and see a new world, because they gaze with faith on Him. Lame limbs are endowed with strength, and can run in the way of His commandments, and walk with unfainting perseverance the thorniest paths of duty and self-sacrifice. Lepers are cleansed from the rotting leprosy of sin, and their flesh comes again, 'as the flesh of a little child.' Deaf ears hear the voice of the Son of God, and the dead who hear live. Good news is preached to all the poor in spirit, and whosoever knows himself to be in need of all things may claim all things as his own in Christ. He who through the ages has been working such works, and works them still, 'needs not to speak anything' to confirm His claims, 'neither is there salvation in any other.' We look for no second Christ; but we look for that same Jesus to come the second time to be the Judge of the world of which He is the Saviour.

The benediction on him who finds none occasion of stumbling in Christ, is at once a beatitude and a warning. It rebukes in the gentlest fashion John's temper, which found difficulty in even the perfect personality of Jesus, and made that which should have been the 'sure foundation' of his spirit a stone of stumbling. Our Lord's consciousness of absolute perfection of moral character, and of absolute perfectness in His office and work, is distinct in the words. He knows that 'there is none occasion of stumbling in Him,' and that whoever finds any, brings it or makes it. He knows and warns us that all blessedness lies for us in recognising Him for what He is—God's sure foundation of our hopes, our peace, our thoughts, our lives. He

knows that all woe and loss are involved in stumbling on this stone, against which whosoever falls is broken, and by which, when it begins to move, and falls on a man, he is ground to powder, like the dust of the threshing-floor. What tremendous arrogance of assertion! Who is he who can venture on such words without blasphemy against God, and universal ridicule from men?

II. The witness of Christ to John. Praise from Jesus is praise indeed; and it is poured out here with no stinted hand on the languishing prisoner whose doubts had just been brought to Him. Such an eulogium at such a time is a wonderful instance of loving forbearance with a true-hearted follower's weakness, and of a desire which, in a man, we should call magnanimous, to shield John's character from depreciation on account of his message. The world praises a man to his face, and speaks of his faults behind his back. Christ does the opposite. Not till the messengers were departing does He begin to speak 'concerning John.' He lays bare the secret of the Baptist's power, and allocates his place as greatest in one epoch and as less than the least in another, with an authority more than human, and on principles which set Himself high above all comparison with men, whether the greatest or the least. The King places His subjects, and Himself sits enthroned above them all.

First, Christ praises John's great personal character in the dramatic and vivid questions which begin this section. He recalls the scenes of popular enthusiasm when all Israel streamed out to the desert preacher. A small man could not have made such an upheaval. What drew the crowds? Just what will always draw them; the qualities without which,

either possessed in reality or in popular estimation, no man can be a power religiously. The first essential is heroic firmness. It was not reeds swaying in the wind by Jordan's banks, nor a poor feeble man like these, that the people flocked to listen to. His emblem was not the reed, but 'an iron pillar.' His whole career had been marked by decisiveness, constancy, courage. Nothing can be done worth doing in the world without a wholesome obstinacy and imperturbability, which keep a man true to his convictions and his task, whatever winds blow in his teeth. The multitudes will not flock to listen to a teacher who does not speak with the accent of conviction, nor will truths feebly grasped touch the lips with fire. The first requisite for a religious teacher is that he shall be sure of his message and of himself. Athanasius has to 'stand against the world' before the world accepts his teaching. 'Though there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the house-tops, go I will,' said Luther. That is the temper for God's instruments.

The next requisite, which John also had, is manifest indifference to material ease. Silken courtiers do not haunt the desert. Kings' houses, and not either the wilderness or kings' dungeons, are the sunny spots where they spread their plumage. If the gaunt ascetic, with his girdle of camel's hair and his coarse fare, had been a self-indulgent sybarite, his voice would never have shaken a nation. The least breath of suspicion that a preacher is such a man ends his power, and ought to end it; for self-indulgence and the love of fleshly comforts eat the heart out of goodness, and make the eyes too heavy to see visions. John was the same man then as they had known him

to be; therefore it was no impatience of the hardships of his prison that had inspired his doubts.

Our Lord next speaks of John's great office. He was a prophet. The dim recognition that God spoke in His fiery words had drawn the crowds, weary of teachers in whose endless jangle and jargon of casuistry was no inspiration. The voice of a man who gets his message at first-hand from God has a ring in it which even dull ears detect as something genuine. Alas for the bewildering babble of echoes and the paucity of voices to-day!

So far Jesus had been appealing to His hearers' knowledge; He now goes on to add higher truth concerning John. He declares that he is more than a prophet, because he is His messenger before His face; that is, immediately preceding Himself. We cannot stay to comment on the remarkable variation between the original form of the quotation from Malachi and Christ's version of it, which, in its substitution of 'thee' for 'me,' bears so forcibly on the divinity of Christ; but we may mark the principle on which John's superiority to the whole prophetic order is based. It is that nearness to Jesus makes greatness. The closer the relation to Him, the higher the honour. In that long procession the King comes last; and of 'them that go before, crying, Hosanna to Him that cometh,' the order of precedence is that the first are last, and that the highest is he who walks in front of the Sovereign.

Next, we have the limitations of the forerunner and his relative inferiority to the least in the kingdom of heaven. Another standard of greatness is here from that of the world, which smiles at the contrast between the uncultured preacher of repentance and the

mighty thinkers, poets, legislators, kingdom-makers, whom it enrols among the great. In Christ's eyes greatness is nearness to Him, and understanding of Him and His work. Neither natural faculty nor worth is in question, but simply relation to the Kingdom and the King. He who had only to preach of Him who should come after him, and had but a partial apprehension of Christ and His work, stood on a lower level than the least who has to look to a Christ who has come, and has opened the gates of the kingdom to the humblest believer. The truths which were hid from ages, and were but visible as in morning twilight to John, are sunlit to us. The scholars in our Sunday-schools know familiarly more than prophets and kings ever knew. We 'hold the grey barbarian lower than the Christian child'; and not merely he, but the wisest of the prophets, and the forerunner himself. The history of the world is parted into two by the coming of Jesus Christ, as every dictionary of dates tells, and the least of the greater is greater than the greatest of the less. What a place, then, does Christ claim! Our relation to Him determines greatness. To recognise Him is to be in the Kingdom of Heaven. Union to Him brings us to fulfil the ideal of human nature; and this is life, to know and trust Him, the King.

Our Lord adds a brief characterisation of the effect of John's ministry. It was of mingled good and evil, and there is a tone of sadness perceptible in the ambiguous words. John had aroused great popular excitement, and had stirred multitudes to seek to enter the Kingdom. So far was good. But had all the crowds understood what sort of kingdom it was? Had they not too often dragged down the lofty con-

ception to their own vulgar level, and, with their dream of an outward sovereignty, thought to gain it for their own by violence instead of meekness, by arms and worldly force rather than by submission? The earnestness was good, but Christ's sad insight saw how much strange fire had mingled in the blaze, as if some earth-born smoky flame should seek to blend with the pure sunlight. Such seems the most natural interpretation of the words, but they are ambiguous, and may possibly mean by 'the violent' those who had been roused to genuine earnestness by the clarion voice which rang in the ears of that slumbering generation.

Then follows the explanation of this new interest in the kingdom. 'All the prophets and the law prophesied until John.' The whole period till his coming was one of preparation, and it all converged on the epoch of the forerunner. The eagerness to flock into the Kingdom which characterised his time would have been impossible in the earlier days. He closes that order of things, standing, as it were, on the isthmus between prophecy and fulfilment, belonging properly to neither, but having affinities with both, and being the transition from the one to the other. Then our Lord closes His words concerning John with the distinct statement, which He expects His hearers to have difficulty in receiving, probably from the contradiction to it which John's present condition seemed to give, that in him was fulfilled Malachi's prophecy of the sending of 'Elijah the prophet before . . . day of the Lord.' The fiery Tishbite, gaunt and grim, ascetic and solitary, who bearded Ahab, and flamed across a corrupt age with a stern message of repentance or destruction, was repeated in the lonely ascetic

who had his Ahab in Herod, and his Jezebel in Herodias, and like his prototype, knew no fear, but flashed out the lightnings of his words on every sin. The two men were brothers, and their voices answer each other across the centuries. Christ crowns His witness to John while thus quoting the last swansong of ancient prophecy, and thereby at once sets John on a pinnacle of greatness, and advances a claim concerning Himself all the more weighty, because He leaves it to be inferred. 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'—this eulogium on the forerunner needs to be reflected on ere all its bearings are seen. If John was Elias, the day of the Lord was at hand, and 'the Sun of Righteousness' was already above the horizon. Jesus' witness concerning John ends in witness concerning Himself.

THE FRIEND OF PUBLICANS AND SINNERS

'The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.'—MATT. xi. 19.

JESUS very seldom took notice of His enemies' slanders. 'When He was reviled He reviled not again.' If ever He did, it was for the sake of those whom it harmed to distort His beauty. Thus, here He speaks, without the slightest trace of irritation, of the capricious inconsistency of condemning Himself and John on precisely opposite grounds. John will not suit them because he neither eats nor drinks. Well, one would think that Jesus would be hailed since He does both. But He pleases them just as little. What was at the root of this contrary working dislike?

It was the dislike for the truths they both preached, the rejection of the wisdom of which they were the messengers. When men do not like the message, nothing that the messengers do, or are, is right. Never mind consistency, but object to this form of Christian teaching that it is too harsh, and to that, that it is too soft; to this man that he is always thundering condemnation, to that, that he is always preaching mercy; to one, that he has too much to say about duty, to another, that he dwells too much on grace; to this presentation of the gospel, that it is too learned and doctrinal, to that, that it is too sentimental and emotional, and so on, and so on. The generation of children who neither like piping nor lamenting, lives still.

But my purpose now is not to dwell on the conduct with which our Lord is dealing, but on this caricature of Him which His own lips repeat without a sign of anger. It is the only calumny of antagonists reported by Himself. We owe our knowledge of its currency to this saying. Like other words of His enemies, this saying is a distorted refraction of His glory. The facts it embodies are facts; the conclusions it draws are false. If Jesus had not come eating and drinking, He could not have been called gluttonous and a wine-bibber. If He had not drawn publicans and sinners to Him in a conspicuous manner and degree, He could not have been called their friend. The charge, like all others, is a tribute. Let us try to see what was the blessed truth that it caricatured. We may take the two points separately, for though closely connected they are distinct, and cover different ground.

I. His enemies' witness to Christ's participation in common life.

(a) That participation witnesses to His true manhood. Significant use of 'Son of Man' in context.

Because He is so, He must pass into all human circumstances.

Looked at in the light of incarnation, the simple fact that He shared our common lot in all things assumes proportions of majestic condescension.

Extend to all physical necessities, and to simple material pleasures.

What a witness this hostile criticism is to Christ's genial identification of Himself with homely feasters!

(b) It sets forth the highest type of manhood.

John could be ascetic, but the Pattern Man could not.

The true perfecting of humanity is not the extirpation, but the control, of the flesh by the spirit. And in accordance with this thought, we may see in the eating and drinking Christ, the pattern for the religious life. Asceticism is not the noblest form of sanctity. There is nothing more striking in Old Testament than the way in which its heroes and saints mingle in all ordinary duties. They are warriors, statesmen, shepherds, they buy, they sell. Asceticism came later, along with formalisms of other sorts. When devotion cools, it is crusted with superstition and external marks of godliness. Propriety in posturing in worship, casuistry in the interpretation of law, and abstinence from common enjoyments, came in Pharisaic times. And into such a world Jesus came, eating and drinking.

But His bearing in these matters is example for us. They were rigidly kept in subordination. They were all done in communion with God.

So He has hallowed all by taking part in them.

Christ should be present in all our material enjoyments. If you cannot think that He is with you, if

you cannot conceive of His being there, that is no place for you. If you cannot feel that He approves, that is no fit enjoyment for you.

The tendency of this day is to take a wider view of the liberty allowed to Christians in regard to partaking in material enjoyment, and I dare say that many of you who have thought that I spoke well in insisting on all things belonging to the Christian, will think that I am dropping back into the old narrow groove in my next remark, that all such thoughts need guarding.

One has heard the example of Christ invoked to justify unchristian laxity and excess. Therefore I wish to say that the liberty permitted to Christians in these matters is to be limited within the limits within which Christ's was confined.

The excessive use of innocent things is not justified by His example, nor is the use of things innocent in themselves, which are mixed up with harmful things.

Christ's example does not warrant the importance attached to luxury, the waste on mere eating and drinking. It is sometimes quoted as against total abstinence. It has no bearing on the question. But if He gave up heaven for His brethren, I think that they who give up an indulgence for the sake of theirs are in the line of His action. I venture to think that if Jesus Christ lived in England to-day, He would be a total abstinence fanatic.

'If thy hand offend thee, cut it off.' Asceticism is not the highest, but it is sometimes necessary. If my indulgence in innocent things hurts me, or if my abstinence from them would help others, or increase my power for good, or if innocent things are inter-twisted with things not innocent, then it is vain to try

to shelter under Christ's example, and the only right course for His disciple is to abridge his liberty. He came eating and drinking, therefore His followers may use all innocent earthly blessings and bodily pleasures, subject to this one law: 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God,' and to this solemn warning: 'He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.'

II. His enemies' witness to Jesus as the friend of the outcasts.

The fact was that He drew them to Himself and evidently was glad to have them round Him. The inference natural to low natures was *noscitur a sociis*, and that the bond between Him and them was common evil tendencies and ways. His censors could not conceive of any one's seeking the outcasts from pity and for their good.

(a) Christ's consorting with these was the revelation of His love to them.

It meant no complicity with, nor minimising of, sinfulness.

His sternness is as conspicuous as His love.

He warned, rebuked, tried to win back.

The highest purity is not repellent to sinners.

So in Jesus is the combination of tenderest love and intense moral earnestness.

How difficult for anything but actual sight of such a life to have painted it! Where did the evangelists get such an embodiment of two attitudes so unlike each other, and which we so seldom see united in fact? I venture to think that the combination in perfect harmony and proportion of these, is a strong presumption in favour of the historical truth of the Christ of the gospels.

But remember that if we take His own statement ('He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'), we are to see in this kindly consorting with sinners not only the love of a perfectly pure manhood, but a revelation of the heart of God. And that adds wonderfulness and awe to the fact. This man to whom sinners were drawn by strange attraction, in whom they found the highest purity and yet softest tenderness, therein revealed God.

(b) It witnesses to His boundless hope.

No outcasts were hopeless in His view. To man's eyes there are hopeless classes, but He sees deeper. 'Perhaps a spark lies hid.' There are dormant possibilities in all souls.

None are so hard as that they cannot be melted by the high temperature of love, just as there are no metals that cannot be volatilised if exposed to intense heat.

Carry the most thick-ribbed ice into the sun and it will thaw.

So the Christian view of mankind is much more hopeful than that of mere educationists or moralists.

None of them paint human nature so black as it does, but none of them have such boundless confidence in the possibility of making it lustrously white.

Urge, then, that none are beyond the power of Christ's gospel. His divine Spirit can change any man. There are no incurables in the judgment of the great Physician.

(c) It witnesses to the truth that gross sin does not shut out from Him so much as does self-complacent ignorance of our own need.

'They that are whole need not a physician, but they

that are sick.' Where should the physician be but at the sick man's bedside?

The one impassable barrier between us and Christ is fancying that we are not sinners and do not need Him.

This boundless hopefulness and seeking after the outcasts is the unique glory of Christianity. What has been the mainspring of all movements for their elevation? What broke the chains of slavery? What has sent men to the ends of the earth for the elevation of savage races? What is the motive power in the benevolent works of this day? Is it philosophical altruism or is it Christian faith? No doubt, there are some sporadic movements among people who do not accept the gospel. At present, I do not ask how far these are due to the underground influence of Christianity filtering to men who stand apart from it. But I gravely doubt whether you will ever get any large, continuous, self-sacrificing efforts for the outcasts, unless they are the direct result of the spirit of Christ moving on men who owe their own deliverance to Him. We have not yet seen agnostic missionary societies or the like.

This spirit must mark all living Christianity. If ever churches forget their obligations to the publicans and sinners, they will cease to grow. It will be a sign that they have lost their hold of Christ. They will soon die, and no mourners will attend their funerals. It is a good sign to-day that all Christian churches are waking up to feel more their obligations to the outcasts. Only, we must take heed that we go to them as Christ did, making no compromise with sin, speaking no false flatteries, and bent on one thing, their emancipation from the evil which is slaying them.

Let us all take the blessed thought for ourselves, that Jesus Christ is our friend because He is the friend of sinners, and we are sinners. Degrees of sinfulness vary, but the fact is invariable. The universality of sinfulness makes the universality of Christ's love the more wonderful and blessed. If He did not love sinners, there would be none for Him to love. We may be His enemies, or may neglect all His beseechings; but He is still our friend, wishing us well, and desiring to bless us. But He cannot give us His deepest friendship unless we are willing to recognise our sin. We must come to Him on the footing of transgressors if we are to come to Him at all.

He will deliver us from our sins.

Appeal to give hearts to Him.

How has He shown His friendship? 'Greater love hath no man than this,' that 'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

To be friends of Christ is the highest honour and blessing.

'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.'

'He was called the friend of God.' Abraham's name in Mohammedan lands is still El Khalil, the companion or friend. That is our highest title. Christ's friends will not continue sinners.

SODOM, CAPERNAUM, MANCHESTER

'Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not.'—MATT. xi. 20.

THESE words, and the woes which they introduce, are found in another connection in Luke's Gospel. He

attaches them to his report of the mission of the seventy disciples. Matthew here introduces them in an order which seems not to depend upon time, but upon identity of subject. It is his method in his Gospel to group together similar events, as we have it exemplified, for instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the long procession of miracles which immediately follows it, as well as in other parts of the Gospel. In this chapter it is not difficult to discover the common idea which binds its parts into a whole. We have a number of instances strung together, illustrating the different effects of Christ's appearance and work on different classes of persons. There pass before us, John the Baptist with his doubts, the excitable multitude ready to take the Kingdom of Heaven by storm, the critics who cavilled with impartial inconsistency alike at John's asceticism and at Christ's freedom. Then follow the woes pronounced by Him upon the indifference of those who knew Him best, and these are succeeded by His rejoicing in spirit over the babes who accepted Him; and the whole is crowned by great words of invitation which extend equally over those and over all other varieties of disposition, and, since all 'labour and are heavy laden,' summon all, be they what they may, to come and find rest in Him. Obviously, then, the order in this chapter is not that of time, but that of subject.

Notice that of all these different classes and types of character that pass in review before us, the one that is singled out for the solemn denunciation of heavy judgment is that of the people who stood in a blaze of light, and simply paid no attention to it. These are the worst sort. I wonder how many of them are in my audience now?

Let me try, then, to bring before you the thoughts naturally suggested by these introductory words, and the solemn, sorrowful forebodings of retribution which follow them. I ask you to look at three things,—the blaze of light; the neglect of the light; the rebuke for the neglected light. ‘Jesus began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done.’

I. First, then, consider the blaze of light.

According to the words of my text, the larger number of the miracles of our Lord were wrought in these three places. ‘Cities,’ our Bible calls them; two of them were little fishing villages, the third a somewhat considerable town. Where are these miracles recorded? Not in our gospels. As for Chorazin, we never hear its name except in this verse, and in the parallel in Luke’s Gospel; and all that He did there is swallowed up in oblivion. As for Bethsaida, there are a couple of miracles, probably, recorded as having been wrought there, though there is some obscurity in reference to the locality of at least one of them. As for Capernaum, there are several miracles recorded as having been performed in that place, and several others referred to as having been done there. But there is nothing in the four gospels that would suggest the statement of the text.

Now the inference (which has nothing to do with my present subject, but which I just note in passing) is,—how extremely fragmentary and incomplete these four gospels avowedly are! They harvest for us a few ears plucked in the great waving cornfield,—and all the others withered and died where they grew. The light falls upon one or two groups in the crowd of miserables whom He helped, the rest lie in dim shadow. You have to think of dozens, I suppose I should not be

exaggerating if I were to say hundreds, of miracles unrecorded but known, lying behind the specimens that we have in the gospels. 'Many other things truly did Jesus, which are not written in this book.'

Our Lord takes these two little fishing villages, and He parallels and contrasts them with the two great maritime cities of Tyre and Sidon, and says that these insignificant places have far more light than those had. Then He isolates Capernaum, a place of more importance, and His own usual settled residence; and, in like manner, He contrasts it with the long-buried Sodom, and proclaims the superiority of the illumination which fell on the more modern three. Why were they so superior? Because they had Moses? because they had the prophets, the law, the temple, the priesthood? By no means. Because they had *Him*. So He sets Himself forth as being the highest and clearest of all the revelations that God has made to the world, and asserts that in Him, in His character, in His deeds, men ought to find motives that should bow them in penitence before God; motives sweeter, tenderer, stronger than any that the world knows besides. There is no such light of the knowledge of the glory of God anywhere else as there is in the face of Jesus Christ. And oh! brother; no thoughts of the nobleness of rectitude, and the imperfection of one's own life, no thoughts of a divine justice and a divine punishment, will bow a man in penitence like having once caught a glimpse of the perfect sweetness and perfect beauty of the perfect Humanity that is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

But now, mark;—as Capernaum is to Sodom, so is Manchester to Capernaum! I wonder if Jesus Christ were to come amongst us now, whether He would not

repeat in spirit the same lesson that is in my text, and bid us contrast our greater illumination with the morning twilight that dawned upon these men, and yet was light enough to bring condemnation? Think,—these people of whom our Lord is speaking here, and setting them high above Tyre and Sidon and Sodom, knew nothing about His cross, death, resurrection, ascension. They knew Him only as ‘a dubious Name,’ as a possible Divine Messenger and a Miracle-worker; but all the sweetest and the deepest thoughts about Him lay unrevealed. Whilst they stood but in the morning twilight, you and I stand in the noonday blaze. *They* might be pardoned for doubting whether the light that shone from Him was sunshine or candle, but men of this twentieth century, who have the whole story of Christ, which is the gospel for the world, wrought out through all the tragedy and pathos of His death, and triumph and power of His resurrection, and who have, besides, the history of the world and of the Church for nineteen centuries, are more unpardonable unless they listen to Him with penitence and faith, than were any of His contemporaries.

My brother, we stand in the very focus and fountain, as it were, of the heavenly radiance. A whole Christ, a crucified Christ, a risen Christ, an ascended Christ, a Christ who is the Lord of the Spirit, a Christ who through the centuries is saving and blessing men, a Christ who can point to nineteen hundred years and say, ‘That is My work, in so far as it is good and noble,’—this Christ shines with a clearer evidence than the Miracle-worker of Capernaum and Bethsaida. And to you the word comes, ‘If the mighty works which have been done in *thee*, had been done in Bethsaida and Chorazin, they would have remained until this day.’

There are many of you here saturated with the knowledge of the gospel, who from childhood have heard it and heard it and heard it. You have lived in the light all your days. Alas! 'If the light that is round thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!'

II. That brings me in the next place to notice the negligent indifference to the Light in all its blaze.

The men of these three little fishing towns were not sinners above all the Galileans of their day. Their crime was that they did nothing. No persecution is recorded as having been raised against Him by them; there were no angry antagonisms, no scornful words, no violent opposition. They simply stolidly stood like some black rock in the sunshine, and let the sunshine pour down upon them, and remained grim and black as ever. That was all.

That is to say, the thing that brings down the severest rebuke is not the angry antagonism of the men who are contending in half-darkness, with a misunderstood and therefore disliked Christ, but the sleek, passive apathy that is never touched deeper than its ears by the message of God's word. It is not a difficult thing to incur this condemnation. You have simply to do what some of you are doing, and have been doing all your lives, as to Christianity, and that is—nothing! You have simply to acquiesce politely and respectfully, as many of you do, and say you are Christians; and there an end. You have simply to take my words (as I fear so many of those that listen to them do) as matters of course, the proper things to be said on a Sunday, and for me to say, which may be very true in some vague, general way, but which have no felt application to *you*. That is all you have to do. It is quite enough. Negative vices will ruin a man, in mind,

body, and estate; and the negative sin of simple indifference avails to put a barrier between you and Jesus Christ, through which none of His blessing can filter. If a sailor does *not* lash himself to something fixed, the next sea that comes across the deck will do the rest. If a sick man does *not* take the medicine, by doing nothing he has committed suicide. And simple passivity, that is to say (to translate it out of Latin into good, honest English), doing nothing, is all that is needed in order to part you from Christ and Christ from you. He ‘upbraided the cities because they repented *not*.’

One can fancy some well-to-do and thoroughly respectable and clean-living native of Capernaum saying, ‘What! those foul beasts in Sodom better off than I? Impossible!’ Well, Jesus Christ says so upon very intelligible grounds. The measure of light is the measure of responsibility. That is one ground. And the not preferring Him is the preferring of self and the world, and that is the sin of sins. He will ‘convince the world of sin because they believe not on Me.’

Now, one more point, viz. this gelatinous kind of indifference, as of a disposition not stiff enough to take any impression, is found most deeply seated, and hopeless, amongst—shall I venture?—amongst people like *you*, who have been listening, listening, listening, until your systems have become so habituated to this Christian preaching that it does not produce the least effect. It all runs off you like rain off waterproof. You have waterproofed your consciences and your spiritual susceptibilities by long habit of listening and doing nothing.

And some of you have come to this point, that you positively rather like the titillation and excitement,

slight though it may be, which is produced by coming in contact now and then with a good, wholesome, rousing Christian appeal. Not that you ever intend to do anything, but it is pleasant to see a man in earnest, and preaching as if he believed what he was saying. And so perhaps some of you are feeling here to-night.

Ah! my dear friends, it is possible for a man to live by the side of Niagara until he cannot hear the cataract; and it is an awful thing for men and women to live under the sound of Christian teaching until it produces no more effect upon their wills and natures than the ringing of the church bells, to which they pay no attention.

You do not know the despair that comes over us preachers time after time, as we look down upon the faces of our congregations, and feel, 'What *shall* I do to put a sharp enough point upon this truth to get it into the heart of some man that has been sitting there as long as I have been standing here, and is never a bit the better for it?' Our most earnest preaching is like putting a red-hot iron into a pond: the cold water puts it out and closes above it, and there is no more heard nor seen of it. Our old Puritan forefathers used to talk about 'gospel-hardened hearers.' I believe that there are people listening to me now who have become so inured to Christian preaching that, like artillery horses, they will not move a muscle or quiver if a whole battery of cannon is fired off under their noses. God knows I despair sometimes, many a time, when I think of the hundreds of people to whom I speak, year after year, and how there seems next to nothing in the world to come of it all.

III. Now lastly, notice here the rebuke of this negligence of the light.

‘He began to upbraid the cities.’ But oh! we shall misunderstand Him and His purpose if we think that that upbraiding was anything but the sorrowful expression of His own loving heart, which warned of what was coming in order that He might never need to send it. ‘*Woe* unto you; *woe* unto you,’ and His own lips quivered and His own heart felt the woe, as He laid bare the sin and foreannounced the retribution.

I do not feel that I dare dwell upon, or that it beseems me to say much about, this solemn thought. Only, dear friends, I do desire, if I could, to wake some of you to look realities for once in the face, and to be sure of this, that retribution is proportioned to light, and that the sin of sins is the rejection of Jesus Christ. Beneath the broad folds of that ‘more tolerable’ there lie infinite degrees of retribution. The same deed done by a group of men may be indefinitely varied in its culpability, according to the motives and the clearness of knowledge which accompany or prompt the doing of it. And so, just because the life beyond is the accurate outcome and issue of the whole character and conduct, estimated according to motive and knowledge, therefore there must be differences infinitely wide between the fate of the servant that knew his Lord’s will, and the servant that knew not.

Where do you think we gospel-drenched English men and women will stand in that allocation of culpability? I do not presume to say more, but I beseech you,—let no present controversies about the duration and the possible termination of retribution in another state, or the possible prolongation of a probation into another state, blind you to the fact that however these questions be settled, this is a truth, independent of them, but being forgotten amidst the dust of controversy,

that the next life *is* a life of retribution, and that there you and I will give account of our deeds, and chiefly of our attitude to Jesus.

And now let me say, in one word,—hoisting the danger-signal is the work of kindness, and Jesus Christ was never more loving than when from His lips there came these words, heavy with His own sorrow, and stern with the prophecy of retribution. I know that Christian teachers have often spoken of the solemn things beyond, in tones much to be deplored, and which weaken the force of their message. But surely, surely, if we believe in a judgment to come, and if we believe that some of those that listen to us are in peril of it, surely, surely, the plainest duty is that with tears in our voice and pleading tenderness in our tone, seeing the sword coming, we should give warning, and beseech men to flee for refuge to the hope of the Gospel. The solemn words that we have been looking at now, lead up to, and are intended to make more impressive and gracious, the invitation with which this chapter ends: ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’

Dear friends, we stand in the blaze of the light. Our familiarity with Jesus Christ may be our ruin. We are tempted to pay no heed to His words because we know them so well. Neglect of Christ on your part will bring deeper woes on your head than the people of Capernaum pulled down upon theirs. The brighter the sunshine, the louder the thunder and the fiercer the lightning; the longer the summer day, the longer the winter night; the closer the comet comes to the sun, the further away it plunges, at the other extremity of its orbit, into space and darkness. So I

beseech you, listen as if you had never heard it before, and listen as if your lives depended upon it (as indeed they do) to that merciful invitation, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,' and then you will get rest for your souls here, and at that day when Sodom and Capernaum and Manchester—they and we—shall stand before His throne, you may lift up your eyes, and be glad to see who it is that sits on the tribunal, and that you learned to know and love the face of your Saviour, before you saw Him enthroned as your Judge.

CHRIST'S STRANGE THANKSGIVING

'I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'—
MATT. xi. 25.

WHEN Jesus was about to cure one dumb man, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and sighed. Sorrow filled His soul in the act of working deliverance. The thought of the depth of the miseries He had come to heal, and of the ocean of them which He was then diminishing but by one poor drop, saddened Him. When Jesus thought of the woes that had fallen on the impenitent Sodom, and of the worse that still remained to be revealed at the day of judgment, He rejoiced in spirit. Strange! and yet all in harmony with His depth of love. This once, and this once only, do we read that His heart filled with joy. Did He lift up His solemn thanksgiving to God, for the woes that had fallen on Chorazin? Oh no! For the blinding of the wise and prudent? Oh no! For the revelation to babes? Yes, and not only for that, but for that full and universal offer and possibility of salvation, which

forms the reason for both the revelation to babes and the hiding from the wise. If we attend to the connection of this passage we get light on its force. It begins with a clear prophecy of endless woe and sorrow upon the rejecters. Then comes my text, alleviating the terror of that thought of destruction by showing the principles on which the reception and rejection are especially based, the sort of people who receive and who reject. Then follows the reason why the wise are shut out and the babes let in. That reason is not only God's inscrutable decree, but something in the very nature of the Gospel. God is hidden from all human sight. There is one divine Revealer apart from whom all is darkness. 'Neither doth any man know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.' That is the characteristic which shuts out the wise and lets in the simple.

Then follows the great call to all to come to Him. The practical issue of all these solemn thoughts is that the Gospel is a Gospel for all the world, and that the one qualification for coming within the terms of its offer is to be 'weary and heavy laden.' Thus all ends in the broad universality of the message, in its adaptation to all, in its offer to all; and thus it is shown that every apparent exclusion of any is but the result of its free offer to all, and that to say 'Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent' is but to say, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.' Well then might joy fill the heart of the Man of Sorrows. Well might He lift up His solemn thanksgiving to God and say, 'I thank Thee, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth.'

Consider—

I. The Great Characteristics of the Gospel.

We shall only understand the ground of the revealing and of the hiding if we understand what it is which is offered. It is of such a nature as necessarily to involve a twofold effect, caused by a twofold attitude towards it.

1. The Gospel addresses itself to all men—man as man—not to what is sectional or accidental, not to classes, not to schools, not to the *élite*. It is broad and universal. It speaks no dialect of a province, but the universal language. It is addressed to Man as Man. ‘We have all of us one human heart.’ It appeals to the noble and the peasant, to the beggar on the dung-hill and to the prince on his throne, in precisely the same fashion. It is equal as the providence of God, impartial as the light, universal as the air which reddens equally the blood that flows in long-descended veins and that of the foundling on the streets. In its sublime universality there are no distinctions. Death and the Gospel know no ranks. In both, ‘the rich and the poor meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all.’ ‘In Christ Jesus there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.’ The blue sky which bends above all alike is like that great word.

2. It treats all as utterly helpless.

3. It offers to all Redemption as their most pressing want. Consequently, in substance it is the gift not of culture, but deliverance, and in form it is not a theory but a fact, not a system of *credenda* but an action, not an *-ology* but a power.

4. It demands from all submission and trust.

These being the characteristics, consider—

II. The qualifications for reception as necessarily resulting from the characteristics.

The persons who receive must be those who consent

to take the station which the Gospel assigns. They must be babes, by which is meant not such as are innocent, but such as are reliant on a higher Power, self-distrustful, willing to obey.

These qualifications are all moral. The organ for reception of the Gospel is the heart, not the head. To receive it by faith is a spiritual, not an intellectual process. Ignorance is no qualification nor no disqualification. Ignorance or knowledge is immaterial. The one condition is to be willing to accept.

III. The disqualification of the wise as necessarily resulting from the qualification.

The organ for the reception is not the head but the heart. Therefore, wisdom is a barrier only in this way, that it has nothing to do in the matter. Its presence or its absence is quite indifferent here as in many other spheres of experience. The joys of the affections, the joys of common emotions, the joys of bodily life—all these are utterly independent of the culture of the understanding.

Hence 'wisdom' becomes a barrier, because its possessors are accustomed to think it the master key. Not intellect, but the pride of intellect, trusting in it, glorying in wisdom is the disqualification.

It is not true that there is any discord between religion and cultivated thought. The loftier the soul, the loftier all its attributes, the nobler should be, may be, its religion. It is not true that there is any natural affinity between ignorance and religion, between narrow understandings and deep faith. That is not the Bible truth. The religion of Christ is not like owls that love the twilight, but like eagles that 'purge their sight at the very fountain itself of heavenly radiance.'

Take history: the great names—an Augustine and a Luther, a Dante and a Milton, a Bacon and a Pascal—are enough to show that there is no antagonism. On the other hand, names enough rise to show that there is no alliance. The inference is that the intellect has little to do with a man's attitude towards the Revelation of God in Christ, but that the moral is all.

Let me close with the repetition of the thought that the apparent exclusion is the result of the universality, and that 'Come unto Me' is Christ's commentary on my text. Well then may we rejoice when we think of a gospel for the world. Whatever you are, it is for you if you are a man. However foolish, though you cannot read a letter and know nothing, it is for you. If you be enriched with all knowledge, you must come on the same terms as that beggar at your side. That is a healthy discipline. You are more than a student, than a scholar, than a thinker; you are a man, you are a sinful man. There is a deeper chamber in your heart than any into which knowledge can penetrate. Christ brings a gospel for all. When we think of it, with its sublime disregard of all peculiarities, we may well rejoice with him who said, 'Ye see your calling, brethren,' and with Him, the loftiest, the incarnate, Wisdom who said, 'I thank Thee, Father.' For if you rightly grasp the bearing of this text, and mark what follows it in our Lord's heart and thoughts, you will see these deep eyes of solemn joy turned from the heaven to you, filmy with compassion, and those hands, then lifted in rapt devotion, stretched out to beckon you and all the world to His breast, and hear the voice that rose in that burst of thanksgiving melting into tenderness as it woos you, be you wise or ignorant, to come to Him and rest.

THE REST GIVER

'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.'—MATT. xi. 28, 29.

ONE does not know whether tenderness or majesty is predominant in these wonderful words. A divine penetration into man's true condition, and a divine pity, are expressed in them. Jesus looks with clear-sighted compassion into the inmost history of all hearts, and sees the toil and the sorrow which weigh on every soul. And no less remarkable is the divine consciousness of power, to succour and to help, which speaks in them. Think of a Jewish peasant of thirty years old, opening his arms to embrace the world, and saying to all men, 'Come and rest on My breast.' Think of a man supposing himself to be possessed of a charm which could soothe all sorrow and lift the weight from every heart.

A great sculptor has composed a group where there diverge from the central figure on either side, in two long lines, types of all the cruel varieties of human pains and pangs; and in the midst stands, calm, pure, with the consciousness of power and love in His looks, and with outstretched hands, as if beckoning invitation and dropping benediction, Christ the Consoler. The artist has but embodied the claim which the Master makes for Himself here. No less remarkable is His own picture of Himself, as 'meek and lowly in heart.' Did ever anybody before say, 'I am humble,' without provoking the comment, 'He that says he is humble proves that he is not'? But Jesus Christ said it, and the world has allowed the claim; and has answered, 'Though Thou bearest record of Thyself, Thy record is true.'

But my object now is not so much to deal with the revelation of our Lord contained in these marvellous words, as to try, as well as I can, to re-echo, however faintly, the invitation that sounds in them. There is a very striking reduplication running through them which is often passed unnoticed. I shall shape my remarks so as to bring out that feature of the text, asking you to look first with me at the twofold designation of the persons addressed; next at the twofold invitation; and last at the twofold promise of rest.

I. Consider then the twofold designation here of the persons addressed, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.'

The one word expresses effort and toil, the other a burden and endurance. The one speaks of the active, the other of the passive, side of human misery and evil. Toil is work which is distasteful in itself, or which is beyond our faculties. Such toil, sometime or other, more or less, sooner or later, is the lot of every man. All work becomes labour, and all labour, sometime or other, becomes toil. The text is, first of all, and in its most simple and surface meaning, an invitation to all the men who know how ceaseless, how wearying, how empty the effort and energy of life is, to come to this Master and rest.

You remember those bitter words of the Book of Ecclesiastes, where the preacher sets forth a circle of labour that only comes back to the point where it began, as being the law for nature and the law for man. And truly much of our work seems to be no better than that. We are like squirrels in a cage, putting forth immense muscular effort, and nothing to show for it after all. 'All is vanity, and striving after wind.'

Toil is a curse ; work is a blessing. But all our work darkens into toil ; and the invitation, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour,' reaches to the very utmost verge of the world and includes every soul.

And then, in like manner, the other side of human experience is set forth in that other word. For most men have not only to work, but to bear ; not only to toil, but to sorrow. There are efforts that need to be put forth, which task all our energy, and leave the muscles flaccid and feeble. And many of us have, at one and the same moment, to work and to weep, to toil whilst our hearts are beating like a forge-hammer ; to labour whilst memories and thoughts that might enfeeble any worker, are busy with us. A burden of sorrow, as well as effort and toil, is, sooner or later, the lot of all men.

But that is only surface. The twofold designation here before us goes a great deal deeper than that. It points to two relationships to God and to God's law of righteousness. Men labour with vague and yet with noble effort, sometimes, to do the thing that is right, and after all efforts there is left a burden of conscious defect. In the purest and the highest lives there come both of these things. And Jesus Christ, in this merciful invitation of His, speaks to all the men that have tried, and tried in vain, to satisfy their consciences and to obey the law of God, and says to them, 'Cease your efforts, and no longer carry that burden of failure and of sin upon your shoulders. Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.'

I should be sorry to think that I was speaking to any man or woman who had not, more or less, tried to do what is right. You have laboured at that effort with more or less of consistency, with more or less of

earnestness. Have you not found that you could not achieve it?

I am sure that I am speaking to no man or woman who has not upon his or her conscience a great weight of neglected duties, of actual transgressions, of mean thoughts, of foul words and passions, of deeds that they would be ashamed that any should see; ashamed that their dearest should catch a glimpse of. My friend, universal sinfulness is no mere black dogma of a narrow Calvinism; it is no uncharitable indictment against the race; it is simply putting into definite words the consciousness that is in every one of your hearts. You know that, whether you like to think about it or not, you have broken God's law, and are a sinful man. You carry a burden on your back whether you realise the fact or no, a burden that clogs all your efforts, and that will sink you deeper into the darkness and the mire. 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour,' and with noble, but, at bottom, vain, efforts have striven after right and truth. 'Come unto Me all ye that are burdened,' and bear, sometimes forgetting it, but often reminded of its pressure by galled shoulders and wearied limbs, the burden of sin on your bent backs.

This invitation includes the whole race. In it, as in a blank form, you may each insert your name. Jesus Christ speaks to thee, John, Thomas, Mary, Peter, whatever thy name may be, as distinctly as if you saw your name written on the pages of your New Testament, when He says to you, 'Come unto Me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden.' For the 'all' is but the sum of the units; and I, and thou, and thou, have our place within the word.

II. Now, secondly, look at the twofold invitation that is here.

‘Come unto Me . . . Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me.’ These two things are not the same. ‘Coming unto Me,’ as is quite plain to the most superficial observation, is the first step in the approach to a companionship, which companionship is afterwards perfected and kept up by obedience and imitation. The ‘coming’ is an initial act which makes a man Christ’s companion. And the ‘Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me,’ is the continuous act by which that companionship is manifested and preserved. So that in these words, which come so familiarly to most of our memories that they have almost ceased to present a sharp meaning, there is not only a merciful summons to the initial act, but a description of the continual life of which that act is the introduction.

And now, to put that into simpler words, when Jesus Christ says ‘Come unto Me,’ He Himself has taught us what is His inmost meaning in that invitation, by another word of His: ‘He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst’; where the parallelism of the clauses teaches us that to come to Christ is simply to put our trust in Him. There is in faith a true movement of the whole soul towards the Master. I think that this metaphor teaches us a great deal more about that faith that we are always talking about in the pulpit, and which, I am afraid, many of our congregations do not very distinctly understand, than many a book of theology does. To ‘come to Him’ implies, distinctly, that He, and no mere theological dogma, however precious and clear, is the Object on which faith rests.

And, therefore, if Christ, and not merely a doctrinal truth about Christ, be the Object of our faith, then it

is very clear that faith, which grasps a Person, must be something more than the mere act of the understanding which assents to a truth. And what more is it? How is it possible for one person to lay hold of and to come to another? By trust and love, and by these alone. These be the bonds that bind men together. Mere intellectual consent may be sufficient to fasten a man to a dogma, but there must be will and heart at work to bind a man to a person; and if it be Christ and not a theology, to which we come by our faith, then it must be with something more than our brains that we grasp Him and draw near to Him. That is to say, your will is engaged in your confidence. Trust Him as you trust one another, only with the difference befitting a trust directed to an absolute and perfect object of trust, and not to a poor, variable human heart. Trust Him as you trust one another. Then, just as husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend, pass through all intervening hindrances and come together when they trust and love, so you come closer to Christ as the very soul of your soul by an inward real union, than you do even to your dear ones, if you grapple Him to your heart with the hoops of steel, which, by simple trust in Him, the Divine Redeemer forges for us. 'Come unto Me,' being translated out of metaphor into fact, is simply 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

And still further, we have here, not only the initial act by which companionship and union with Jesus Christ is brought about, but the continual course by which it is kept up, and by which it is manifested. The faith which saves a man's soul is not all which is required for a Christian life. 'Take My yoke upon you,

and *learn of Me.*' The yoke is that which, laid on the broad forehead or the thick neck of the ox, has attached to it the cords which are bound to the burden that the animal draws. The burden, then, which Christ gives to His servants to pull, is a metaphor for the specific duties which He enjoins upon them to perform; and the yoke by which they are fastened to their burdens, 'obliged' to their duties, is His authority. So to 'take His yoke' upon us is to submit our wills to His authority. Therefore this further call is addressed to all those who have come to Him, feeling their weakness and their need and their sinfulness, and have found in Him a Saviour who has made them restful and glad; and it bids them live in the deepest submission of will to Him, in joyful obedience, in constant service; and, above all, in the daily imitation of the Master.

You must put both these commandments together before you get Christ's will for His children completely expressed. There are some of you who think that Christianity is only a means by which you may escape the penalty of your sins; and you are ready enough, or fancy yourselves so, to listen when He says, 'Come to Me that you may be pardoned,' but you are not so ready to listen to what He says afterwards, when He calls upon you to take His yoke upon you, to obey Him, to serve Him, and above all to copy Him. And I beseech you to remember that if you go and part these two halves from one another, as many people do, some of them bearing away the one half and some the other, you have got a maimed Gospel; in the one case a foundation without a building, and in the other case a building without a foundation. The people who say that Christ's call to the world is 'Come

unto Me,' and whose Christianity and whose Gospel is only a proclamation of indulgence and pardon for past sin, have laid hold of half of the truth. The people who say that Christ's call is 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me,' and that Christianity is a proclamation of the duty of pure living after the pattern of Jesus Christ our great Example, have laid hold of the other half of the truth. And both halves bleed themselves away and die, being torn asunder; put them together, and each has power.

That separation is one reason why so many Christian men and women are such poor Christians as they are—having so little real religion, and consequently so little real joy. I could lay my fingers upon many men, professing Christians—I do not say whether in this church or in other churches—whose whole life shows that they do not understand that Jesus Christ has a twofold summons to His servants; and that it is of no avail once, long ago, to have come, or to think that you have come, to Him to get pardon, unless day by day you are keeping beside Him, doing His commandments, and copying His sweet and blessed example.

III. And now, lastly, look at the twofold promise which is here.

I do not know if there is any importance to be attached to the slight diversity of language in the two verses, so as that in the one case the promise runs, 'I will *give* you rest,' and in the other, 'Ye shall *find* rest.' That sounds as if the rest that was contingent upon the first of the invitations was in a certain and more direct and exclusive fashion Christ's gift than the rest which was contingent upon the second. It may be so, but I attach no importance to that criticism; only I would have you observe that

our Lord distinctly separates here between the rest of 'coming,' and the rest of wearing His 'yoke.' These two, howsoever they may be like each other, are still not the same. The one is the perfecting and the prolongation, no doubt, of the other, but has likewise in it some other, I say not more blessed, elements. Dear brethren, here are two precious things held out and offered to us all. There is rest in coming to Christ; the rest of a quiet conscience which gnaws no more; the rest of a conscious friendship and union with God, in whom alone are our soul's home, harbour, and repose; the rest of fears dispelled; the rest of forgiveness received into the heart. Do you want that? Go to Christ, and as soon as you go to Him you will get that rest.

There is rest in faith. The very act of confidence is repose. Look how that little child goes to sleep in its mother's lap, secure from harm because it trusts. And, oh! if there steal over our hearts such a sweet relaxation of the tension of anxiety when there is some dear one on whom we can cast all responsibility, how much more may we be delivered from all disquieting fears by the exercise of quiet confidence in the infinite love and power of our Brother Redeemer, Christ! He will be 'a covert from the storm, and a refuge from the tempest'; as 'rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' If we come to Him, the very act of coming brings repose.

But, brethren, that is not enough, and, blessed be God! that is not all. There is a further, deeper rest in obedience, and emphatically and most blessedly there is a rest in Christ-likeness. 'Take My yoke upon you.' There is repose in saying 'Thou art my Master,

and to Thee I bow.' You are delivered from the unrest of self-will, from the unrest of contending desires, you get rid of the weight of too much liberty. There is peace in submission; peace in abdicating the control of my own being; peace in saying, 'Take Thou the reins, and do Thou rule and guide me.' There is peace in surrender and in taking His yoke upon us.

And most especially the path of rest for men is in treading in Christ's footsteps. 'Learn of Me,' it is the secret of tranquillity. We have done with passionate hot desires,—and it is these that breed all the disquiet in our lives—when we take the meekness and the lowliness of the Master for our pattern. The river will no longer roll, broken by many a boulder, and chafed into foam over many a fall, but will flow with even foot, and broad, smooth bosom, to the parent sea.

There is quietness in self-sacrifice, there is tranquillity in ceasing from mine own works and growing like the Master.

'The Cross is strength; the solemn Cross is gain.
The Cross is Jesus' breast,
Here giveth He the rest,
That to His best beloved doth still remain.'

'Take up thy cross daily,' and thou enterest into His rest.

My brother, 'the wicked is like the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.' But you, if you come to Christ, and if you cleave to Christ, may be like that 'sea of glass, mingled with fire,' that lies pure, transparent, waveless before the Throne of God, over which no tempests rave, and which, in its deepest depths, mirrors the majesty of 'Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and of the Lamb.'

THE PHARISEES' SABBATH AND CHRIST'S

'At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and His disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. 2. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto Him, Behold, Thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day. 3. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; 4. How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? 5. Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6. But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. 7. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. 8. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day. 9. And when he was departed thence, He went into their synagogue: 10. And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse Him. 11. And He said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? 12. How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days. 13. Then saith He to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. 14. Then the Pharisees went out, and held a counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him.'—MATT. xii. 1-14.

WE have had frequent occasion to point out that this Gospel is constructed, not on chronological, but on logical lines. It groups together incidents related in subject, though separated in time. Thus we have the collection of Christ's sayings in the Sermon on the Mount, followed by the collection of doings in chapters viii. and ix., the collected charge to His ambassadors in chapter x., the collection of instances illustrative of the relations of different classes to the message of the Kingdom and its King in chapter xi., and now in this chapter a series of incidents setting forth the growing bitterness of antagonism on the part of the guardians of traditional and ceremonial religion. This is followed, in the next chapter, with a series of parables.

The present lesson includes two Sabbath incidents, in the first of which the disciples are the transgressors of the sabbatic tradition; in the second, Christ's own

action is brought into question. The scene of the first is in the fields, that of the second is in the synagogue. In the one, Sabbath observance is set aside at the call of personal needs; in the other, at the call of another's calamity. So the two correspond to the old Puritan principle that the Sabbath law allowed of 'works of necessity and of mercy.'

I. The Sabbath and personal needs. This is a strange sort of King who cannot even feed His servants. What a glimpse into the penury of their usual condition the quiet statement that the disciples were hungry gives us, especially if we remember that it is not likely that the Master had fared better than they! Indeed, His reference to David and his band of hungry heroes suggests that 'He was an hungred' as well as 'they that were with Him.' As they traversed some field path through the tall yellowing corn, they gathered a few ears, as the merciful provision of the law allowed, and hastily began to eat the rubbed-out grains. As soon as they 'began,' the eager Pharisees, who seem to have been at their heels, call Him to 'behold' this dreadful crime, which, they think, requires His immediate remonstrance. If they had had as sharp eyes for men's necessities as for their faults, they might have given them food which it was 'lawful' to eat, and so obviated this frightful iniquity. But that is not the way of Pharisees. Moses had not forbidden such gleaning, but the casuistry which had spun its multitudinous webs over the law, hiding the gold beneath their dirty films, had decided that plucking the ears was of the nature of reaping, and reaping was work, and work was forbidden, which being settled, of course the inferential prohibition became more important than the law from which it was deduced.

That is always the case with human conclusions from revelation; and the more questionable these are, the more they are loved by their authors, as the sickly child of a family is the dearest.

Our Lord does not question the authority of the tradition, nor ask where Moses had forbidden what His disciples were doing. Still less does He touch the sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath. He accepts His questioners' position, for the time, and gives them a perfect answer on their own ground. Perhaps there may be just a hint in the double 'Have ye not read?' that they could not produce Scripture for their prohibition, as He would do for the liberty which He allowed. He quotes two instances in which ceremonial obligations gave way before higher law. The first, that of David and his followers eating the shewbread, which was tabooed to all but priests, is perhaps chosen with some reference to the parallel between Himself, the true King, now unrecognised and hunted with His humble followers, and the fugitive outlaw with his band. It is but a veiled allusion at most; but, if it fell on good soil, it might have led some one to ask, 'If this is David, where is Saul, and where is Doeg, watching him to accuse him?' This example serves our Lord's purpose of showing that even a divine prohibition, if it relates to mere ceremonial matter, melts, like wax, before even bodily necessities. What a thrill of holy horror would meet the enunciation of the doctrine that such a carnal thing as hunger rightfully abrogated a sacred ritual proscription! The law of right is rigid; that of external ceremonies is flexible. Better that a man should die than that the one should be broken; better that the other should be flung to the winds than that a hungry man should

go unfed. It may reasonably be doubted whether all Christian communities have learned the sweep of that principle yet, or so judge of the relative importance of keeping up their appointed forms of worship, and of feeding their hungry brother. The brave Ahimelech, 'the son of Ahitub,' was ahead of a good many people of to-day.

The second example comes still closer to the question in hand, and supplies the reference to the Sabbath law, which the former had not. There was much hard work done in the temple on the Sabbath—sacrifices to be slain, fires and lamps to be kindled, and so on. That was not Sabbath desecration. Why? Because it was done in the temple, and as a part of divine service. The sanctity of the place, and the consequent sanctity of the service, exempted it from the operation of the law. The question, no doubt, was springing to the lips of some scowling Pharisee, 'And what has that to do with our charge against your disciples?' when it was answered by the wonderful next words, 'In this place'—here among the growing corn, beneath the free heaven, far away from Jerusalem—'is one greater than the temple.' Profound words, which could only sound as blasphemy or nonsense to the hearers, but which touch the deepest truths concerning His person and His relations to men, and which involve the destruction of all temples and rituals. He is all that the temple symbolised. In Him the Godhead really dwells; He is the meeting-place of God and man, the place of the oracle, the place of sacrifice. Then, where He stands is holy ground, and all work done with reference to Him is worship. These poor followers of His are priests; and if, for His sake, they had broken a hundred Sabbath regulations, they were guiltless.

So far our Lord has been answering His opponents; now He attacks. The quotation from Hosea is often on His lips. Here He uses it to unmask the real motives of His assailants. Their murmuring came not from more religion, but from less love. If they had had a little more milk of human kindness in them, it would have died on their lips; if they had grasped the real meaning of the religion they professed, they would have learned that its soul was 'mercy'—that is, of course, man's gentleness to man—and that sacrifice and ceremony were but the body, the help, and sometimes the hindrance, of that soul. They would have understood the relative importance of disposition and of external worship, as end and means, and not have visited a mere breach of external order with a heat of disapprobation only warranted by a sin against the former. Their judgment would have been liker God's if they had looked at those poor hungry men with merciful eyes and with merciful hearts, rather than with eager scrutiny that delighted to find them tripping in a triviality of outward observance. What mountains of harsh judgment by Christ's own followers on each other would have been removed into the sea if the spirit of these great words had played upon them!

The 'for' at the beginning of verse 8 seems to connect with the last words of the preceding verse, 'I call them guiltless, for,' etc. It states more plainly still the claim already put forward in verse 6. 'The Son of Man,' no doubt, is equivalent to 'Messiah'; but it is more, as revealing at once Christ's true manhood and His unique and complete manhood, in which the very ideal of man is personally realised. It can never be detached from His other name, the 'Son of God.'

They are the obverse and reverse of the same golden coin. He asserts His power over the Sabbath, as enjoined upon Israel. His is the authority which imposed it. It is plastic in His hands. The whole order of which it is part has its highest purpose in witnessing of Him. He brings the true 'rest.'

II. The Sabbath, and works of beneficence. Matthew appears to have brought together here two incidents which, according to Luke, were separated in time. The scene changes to a synagogue, perhaps that of Capernaum. Among the worshippers is a man with 'a withered hand,' who seems to have been brought there by the Pharisees as a bait to try to draw out Christ's compassion. What a curious state of mind that was,—to believe that Christ could work miracles, and to want Him to do one, not for pity's sake, nor for confirmation of faith, but to have material for accusing Him! And how heartlessly careless of the poor sufferer they are, when they use him thus! He for his part stands silent. Desire and faith have no part in evoking this miracle. Deadly hatred and calculating malignity ask for it, and for once they get their wish. Having baited their hook, and set the man with his shrunk hand full in view, they get into their corners and wait the event. Matthew tells us that they ask our Lord the question which Luke represents Him as asking them. Perhaps we may say that He gave voice to the question which they were asking in their hearts. Their motive is distinctly given here. They wanted material for a legal process before a local tribunal. The whole thing was an attempt to get Jesus within the meshes of the law. Again, as in the former case, it is the traditional, not the written, law, which healing would have broken. The question

evidently implies that, in the judgment of the askers, healing was unlawful. Talmudical scholars tell us that in later days the rabbis differed on the point, but that the prevalent opinion was, that only sicknesses threatening immediate danger to life could lawfully be treated on the Sabbath. The more rigid doctrine was obviously held by Christ's questioners. It is a significant instance of the absurdity and cruelty which are possible when once religion has been made a matter of outward observance. Nothing more surely and completely ossifies the heart and blinds common sense.

In His former answer Jesus had appealed to Scripture to bear out His teaching that Sabbath observance must bend to personal necessities. Here He appeals to the natural sense of compassion to confirm the principle that it must give way to the duty of relieving others. His question is as confident of an answer as the Pharisees' had been. But though He takes it for granted that His hearers could only answer it in one way, the microscopic and cold-blooded ingenuity of the rabbis, since His day, answers it in another. They say, 'Don't lift the poor brute out, but throw in a handful of fodder, and something for him to lie upon, and let him be till next day.' A remarkable way of making 'thine ox and thine ass' keep the Sabbath! There is a delicacy of expression in the question; the owner of 'one sheep' would be more solicitous about it than if he had a hundred; and our Shepherd looks on all the millions of His flock with a heart as much touched by their sorrow and needs as if each were His only possession. The question waits for no answer; but Christ goes on (as if there could be but one reply) to His conclusion, which He binds to

His first question by another, equally easy to answer. Man's superiority to animals makes his claim for help more imperative. 'You would not do less for one another than for a sheep in a hole, surely.' But the form in which our Lord put His conclusive answer to the Pharisees gives an unexpected turn to the reply. He does not say, 'It is lawful to heal,' but, 'It is lawful to do well,' thus at once showing the true justification of healing, namely, that it was a beneficent act, and widening the scope of His answer to cover a whole class of cases. 'To do well' here means, not to do right, but to do good, to benefit men. The principle is a wide one: the charitable succour of men's needs, of whatever kind, is congruous with the true design of that day of rest. Have the churches laid that lesson to heart? On the whole, it is to be observed that our Lord here distinctly recognises the obligation of the Sabbath, that He claims power over it, that He permits the pressure of one's own necessities and of others' need of help, to modify the manner of its observance, and that He leaves the application of these principles to the spiritual insight of His followers.

The cure which follows is done in a singular fashion. Without a whisper of request from the sufferer or any one else, He heals him by a word. His command has a promise in it, and He gives the power to do what He bids the man do. 'Give what Thou commandest,' says St. Augustine, 'and command what Thou wilt.' We get strength to obey in the act of obedience. But beyond the possible symbolical significance of the mode of cure, and beyond the revelation of Christ's power to heal by a word, the manner of healing had a special reason in the very cavils of the Pharisees. Not even

they could accuse Him of breaking any Sabbath law by such a cure. What had He done? Told the man to put out his hand. Surely that was not unlawful. What had the man done? Stretched it forth. Surely that broke no subtle rabbinical precept. So they were foiled at every turn, driven off the field of argument, and baffled in their attempt to find ground for laying an information against Him. But neither His gentle wisdom nor His healing power could reach these hearts, made stony by conceit and pedantic formalism; and all that their contact with Jesus did was to drive them to intenser hostility, and to send them away to plot His death. That is what comes of making religion a round of outward observances. The Pharisee is always blind as an owl to the light of God and true goodness; keen-sighted as a hawk for trivial breaches of his cobweb regulations, and cruel as a vulture to tear with beak and claw. The race is not extinct. We all carry one inside us, and need God's help to cast him out.

AN ATTEMPT TO ACCOUNT FOR JESUS

'But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.'—MATT. xii. 24.

MARK'S Gospel tells us that this astonishing explanation of Christ and His work was due to the ingenious malice of an ecclesiastical deputation, sent down from Jerusalem to prevent the simple folk in Galilee from being led away by this new Teacher. They must have been very hard put to it to explain undeniable but unwelcome facts, when they hazarded such a preposterous theory.

Formal religionists never know what to make of a man who is in manifest touch with the unseen. These scribes, like Christ's other critics, judged themselves in judging Him, and bore witness to the very truths that they were eager to deny. For this ridiculous explanation admits the miraculous, recognises the impossibility of accounting for Christ on any naturalistic hypothesis, and by its very outrageous absurdity indicates that the only reasonable explanation of the facts is the admission of His divine message and authority. So we may learn, even from such words as these, how the glory of Jesus Christ shines, though distorted and blurred, through the fogs of prejudice and malice.

I. Note, then, first, the unwelcome and undeniable facts that insist upon explanation.

I have said that these hostile critics attest the reality of the miracles. I know that it is not fashionable at present to attach much weight to the fact that none of all the enemies that saw them ever had a doubt about the reality of Christ's miracles. I know quiet well that in an age that believed in the possibility of the supernatural, as this age does *not*, credence would be more easy, and that such testimony is less valuable than if it had come from a jury of scientific twentieth century sceptics. But I know, on the other hand, that for long generations the expectation of the miraculous had died out before Christ came; that His predecessor, John the Baptist, made no such claims; and that, at first, at all events, there was no expectation of Jesus working miracles, to lead to any initial ease of acceptance of His claims. And I know that there were never sharper and more hostile eyes brought to bear upon any man and his work than the

eyes of these ecclesiastical 'triers.' It would have been so easy and so triumphant a way of ending the whole business if they could have shown, what they were anxious to be able to show, that the miracle was a trick. And so I venture to think that not without some weight is the attestation from the camp of the enemy, 'This man casteth out demons.'

But you have to remember that amongst the facts to be explained is not only this one of Christ's works having passed muster with His enemies, but the other of His own reiterated and solemn claim to have the power of working what we call miracles. Now, I wish to dwell on that for one moment, because it is fashionable to put one's thumb upon it nowadays. It is not unusual to eliminate from the Gospel narrative all that side of it, and then to run over in eulogiums about the rest. But what we have to deal with is this fact, that the Man whom the world admits to be the consummate flower of humanity, meek, sane, humble, who has given all generations lessons in self-abnegation and devotion, claimed to be able to raise the dead, to cast out demons, and to do many wonderful works. And though we should be misrepresenting the facts if we said that He did what His followers have too often been inclined to do, *i.e.* rested the stress of evidence upon that side of His work, yet it is an equal exaggeration in the other direction to do, as so many are inclined to do to-day, *i.e.* disparage the miraculous evidence as no evidence at all. 'Go and tell John the things that ye see and hear,'—that is His own answer to the question, 'Art Thou He that should come?' And though I rejoice to believe that there are far loftier and more blessed answers to it than these outward signs and

tokens, they *are* signs and tokens; and they are part of the whole facts that have to be accounted for.

I would venture to widen the reference of my text for a moment, and include not only the actual miracles of our Lord's earthly life, but all the beneficent, hallowing, elevating, ennobling, refining results which have followed upon the proclamation of His truth in the world ever since. I believe, as I think Scripture teaches me to believe, that in the world today Christ is working; and that it is a mistake to talk about the results of 'Christianity,' meaning thereby some abstract system divorced from Him. It is the working of Jesus Christ in the world that has brought 'nobler manners, purer laws'; that has given a new impulse and elevation to art and literature; that has lifted the whole tone of society; that has suppressed ancient evils; that has barred the doors of old temples of devildom, of lust, and cruelty, and vice; and that is still working in the world for the elevation and the deifying of humanity. And I claim the whole difference between 'B.C. and A.D.'—the whole difference between Christendom and Heathendom—as being the measure of the continuous power with which Jesus Christ has grappled with and throttled the snakes that have fastened on men. That continuous operation of His in delivering from the powers of evil has, indeed, not yielded such results as might have been expected. But just as on earth He was hindered in the exercise of His supernatural power by men's unbelief, so that 'He could do no mighty works, save that He laid His hands on a few sick folk' here and there, 'and healed them,' so He has been thwarted by His Church, and hindered in the world, from mani-

festing the fulness of His power. But yet, sorrowfully admitting that, and taking as deserved the scoffs of the men that say, 'Your Christianity does not seem to do so very much after all,' I still venture to allege that its record is unique; and that these are facts which wise men ought to take into account, and have some fairly plausible way of explaining.

II. Secondly, note the preposterous explanation.

'This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.' That is the last resort of prejudice so deep that it will father an absurdity rather than yield to evidence. And Christ has no difficulty in putting it aside, as you may remember, by a piece of common sense: 'If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, and his kingdom cannot stand.' There is an old play which has for its title, *The Devil as an Ass*. He is not such an ass as that, to build up with one hand and cast down with the other. As the proverb has it, 'Hawks do not pick out hawks' eyes.' But this plainly hopeless attempt to account for Christ and His work may be turned into a witness for both, and yield not unimportant lessons.

This explanation witnesses to the insufficiency of all explanations which omit the supernatural. These men felt that they had to do with a Man who was in touch with a whole world of unseen powers; and that they had here to deal with something to which ordinary measuring lines were palpably inapplicable. And so they fell back upon 'by Beelzebub'; and they thereby admitted that humanity without something more at the back of it never made such a man as that. And I beg you to lay that to heart. It is very easy to solve an insoluble problem if you begin

by taking all the insoluble elements out of it. And that is how a great deal of modern thinking does with Christianity. Knock out all the miracles; pooh-pooh all Christ's claims; say nothing about Incarnation; declare Resurrection to be entirely unhistorical, and you will not have much difficulty in accounting for the rest; and it will not be worth the accounting for. But here is the thing to be dealt with, that *whole* life, the Christ of the Gospels. And I venture to say that any explanation professing to account for Him which leaves out His coming from an unseen world, and His possession of powers above this world of sense and nature, is ludicrously inadequate. Suppose you had a chain which for thousands of years had been winding on to a drum, and link after link had been rough iron, and all at once there comes one of pure gold, would it be reasonable to say that it had been dug from the same mine, and forged in the same fires, as its black and ponderous companions? Generation after generation has passed across the earth, each begetting sons after its own likeness; and lo! in the midst of them starts up one sinless Man. Is it reasonable to say that He is the product of the same causes which have produced all the millions, and never another like Him? Surely to account for Jesus without the supernatural is hopeless.

Further, this explanation may be taken as an instance showing the inadequacy of all theories and explanations of Christ and Christianity from an unbelieving point of view. It was the first attempt of unbelievers to explain where Christ's power came from. Like all first attempts, it was crude, and it has been amended and refined since. Earlier generations did not hesitate to call the Apostles liars, and Christ's

contemporaries did not hesitate to call Him 'this deceiver.' We have got beyond that; but we still are met by explanations of the power of the Gospel and of Christ, its subject and Author, which trace these to ignoble elements, and do not shrink from asserting that a blunder or a hallucination lies at the foundation.

Now, I am not going to enter upon these matters at any length, but I would just recall to you our Lord's broad, simple principle: 'A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, neither doth a good tree bring forth evil fruit.' And I would apply that all round. Christian teachers have often made great mistakes, as it seems to me, by tracing the prevalence of the power of some heathen religions to their vices and lies. No system has ever had great moral power in this world but by reason of its excellences and truths. Moham-
medanism, for instance, swept away, and rightly, a mere formal superstition which called itself Christianity, because it grasped the one truth: 'There is no God but God'; and it had faith of a sort. Monasticism held the field in Europe, with all its faults, for centuries, because it enshrined the great Christian truth of self-sacrifice and absolute obedience. And you may take it as a fixed rule, that howsoever some 'mixture of falsehood doth ever please,' as Bacon says, in his cynical way, the reason for the power of any great movement has been the truth that was in it and not the lie; and the reason why great men have exercised influence has been their greatness and their goodness, and not their smallnesses and their vices.

I apply that all round, and I ask you to apply it to Christianity; and in the light of such plain principles to answer the question: 'Where did this Man, so fair,

so radiant, so human and yet so superhuman, so universal and yet so individual—where did He come from? and where did the Gospel, which flows from Him, and which has done such things in the world as it has done—where did it come from? ‘Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?’ If it is true that Jesus Christ is either mistakenly represented in the Gospels, or that He made enthusiastic claims which cannot be verified; and if it is true that the faith in a Resurrection on which Christianity is suspended, and which has produced such fruits as we know have been produced, is a delusion; then all I can say is that the noblest lives that ever were lived in the world have found their impulse in a falsehood or a dream; and that the richest clusters that ever have yielded wine for the cup have grown upon a thorn. If like produces like, you cannot account for Christ and Christianity by anything short of the belief in His Divine mission. Serpents’ eggs do not hatch out into doves. This Man, when He claimed to be God’s Son and the world’s Saviour, was no brain-sick enthusiast; and the results show that the Gospel which His followers proclaim rests upon no lie.

Again, this explanation is an instance of the credulity of unbelief. Think of the mental condition which could swallow such an explanation of such a Worker and such work. It is more difficult to believe the explanation than the alternative which it is framed to escape. So it is always. The difficulties of faith are small by comparison with those of unbelief, gnats beside camels, and that that is so is plain from the short duration of each unbelieving explanation of Jesus. One can remember in the compass of one’s own life more than one assailant

taking the field with much trumpeting and flag-waving, whose attack failed and is forgotten. The child's story tells of a giant who determined to slay his enemy, and belaboured an empty bed with his club all night, and found his foe untouched and fresh in the morning. The Gospel is here; what has become of its assailants? They are gone, and the limbo into which the scribes' theory has passed will receive all the others. So we may be quite patient, and sure that the sieve of time, which is slowly and constantly working, will riddle out all the rubbish, and cast it on the dunghill where so many exploded theories rot forgotten.

III. And now, one word about the last point; and that is—the true explanation.

Now, at this stage of my sermon, I must not be tempted to say a word about the light which our Lord throws, in these declarations in the context, into that dim unseen world. His words seem to me to be too solemn and didactic to be taken as accommodations to popular prejudice, and a great deal too grave to be taken as mere metaphor. And I, for my part, am not so sure that, apart from Him, I know all things in heaven and earth, as to venture to put aside these solemn words of His—which lift a corner of the veil which hides the unseen—and to dismiss them as unworthy of notice. Is it not a strange thing that a world which is so ready to believe in spiritual communications when they are vouched for by a newspaper editor, is so unwilling to believe them when they are in the Bible? And is it not a strange thing that scientists, who are always taunting Christians with the importance they attach to man in the plan of the universe, and ask if all these starry orbs

were built for him, should be so incredulous of teachings which fill the waste places with loftier beings? But that is by the way.

What does Christ say in the context? He tells the secret of His power. 'I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons.' And then He goes on to speak about a conflict that He wages with a strong man; and about His binding the strong man, and spoiling his house. All which, being turned into modern language, is just this, that the Lord, by His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and government at the right hand of God, has broken the powers of evil in their central hold. He has crushed the serpent's head; and though He may still, as Milton puts it, 'swinge the scaly horror of his folded tail,' it is but the flurries of the dying brute. The conquering heel is firm on his head. So, brethren, evil is conquered, and Christ is the Conqueror; and by His work in life and death He has delivered them that were held captive of the devil. And you and I may, if we will, pass into 'the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.'

That is the only explanation of Him—in His person, in His character, in His work, and in the effects of that work in the world—that covers all the facts, and will hold water. All others fail, and they mostly fail by boldly eliminating the very facts that need to be accounted for. Let us rather look to Him, thankful that our Brother has conquered; and let us put our trust in that Saviour. For, if His explanation is true, then a very solemn personal consideration arises for each of us, 'If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you,' it stands beside us; it calls for our obedience. Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone,

can cast the evils out of our natures. It is the Incarnate Christ, the Divine Christ, the crucified Christ, the ascended Christ, the indwelling Christ, who will so fill our hearts that there shall be no aching voids there to invite the return of the expelled tyrants. If any other reformation pass upon us than the thorough one of receiving Him by faith into our hearts, then, though they may be swept and garnished, they will be empty; and the demons will come back. With Jesus inside—they will be outside.

'MAKE THE TREE GOOD'

' . . . Make the tree good, and his fruit good. . . . '—MATT. xii. 33.

IN this Gospel we find that our Lord twice uses this image of a tree and its fruit. In the Sermon on the Mount He applies it as a test to false teachers, who hide, beneath the wool of the sheep's clothing, the fangs and paws of ravening wolves. He says, 'By their deeds ye shall know them; for as is the tree so is its fruit.' That is a rough and ready test, which applies rather to the teacher than to his doctrine, but it applies, to some extent, to the doctrine too, on the hypothesis that the teacher's life fairly represents it. Of course, it is not the only thing that we have to take into account; but it may prick many a bladder, and unmask many an error, and it is the way by which the masses generally judge of systems and of their apostles. A saintly life has more power than dusty volumes of controversy.

But in our text Christ applies the same thoughts in rather a deeper fashion. Here the lesson that He

would have us draw is of the connection between character and conduct; how what we do is determined by what we are, and how, not of course with the same absolute regularity and constancy, but still somewhat in the same fashion as the fruit is true to the tree, so, after all allowance made for ups and downs, for the irregular play of will and conscience, for the strife that is waged within a man, for the temptations of external circumstances, and the like—still, in general, as is the inner man, so is the outward manifestation. The facts of a life are important mainly as registering and making visible the inner condition of the doer. Now, that seems very elementary. Everybody believes that ‘out of the heart are the issues of life,’ as a wise man said long ago, but it is one of the truths that, if grasped and worked into our consciousness, and out in our lives, would do much to revolutionise them. And so, though it is a very old story, and though we all admit it, I wish now to come face to face with the consequences of this thought, that behind action lies character, and that Doing is the second step, and Being is the first.

I. I would ask you to notice how here we are confronted with the great problem for every man.

‘Make the tree good.’ It takes a good man to do good things. So how shallow is all that talk, ‘do, do, do,’ this, that, and the other thing. All right, but *be*; that is the first thing; or, as Christ said, ‘Make the tree good, and the fruit’ will take care of itself. So do you not see how, if that is true about us, we are each brought full front up to this, ‘Am I trying to make my tree good? And what kind of success am I having in the attempt?’ The water that rises from some spring will bring up with it, in solution, a trace of

a bed of salt through which it has come, and of all the minerals in the soil through which it has passed. And as its sparkling waters come out into the light, if one could analyse them completely, one might register a geological section of the strata through which it has risen. So, our acts bear in them a revelation of all the hidden beds through which they have risen; and sometimes they are bitter and salt, but they are always true to the self whose apocalypse they are to the world, or at all events to God.

Therefore, brethren, I have to urge this, that we shall not be doing our true work as men and women, if we are simply trying to better our actions, important as these are. By this saying the centre of gravity is shifted, and in one aspect, the deeds are made less important. The condition of the hidden man of the heart is the all-important thing. Christ's word comes to each of us as the briefest statement of all that it is our highest duty and truest wisdom to aim at in life—'Make the tree good.'

If you have ever tried it honestly, and have not been contented with the superficial cleaning up of outsides, which consists in shifting the dirt into another place only, not in getting rid of it, I know what met you almost as soon as you began, like some great black rock that rises in a mountain-pass, and forbids all farther advance—the consciousness that you were *not* good met you. I am not going to talk theological technicalities. Never mind about phrases—they have been the ruin of a great deal of earnest preaching—call it what you like, here is a fact, that whenever a man sets himself, with anything like resolute determination and rigid self-examination, to the task of getting himself right, he finds that he is wrong. That

being the case, each of us has to deal with a tremendous problem; and the more earnestly and honestly we try to deal with it, the more we shall feel how grave it is. You can cure a great deal, I know. God forbid that I should say one word that seems to deny a man's power to do much in the direction of self-improvement, but after all that is done, again you are brought short up on this fact, the testimony of conscience. And so I see men labouring at a task as vain as that of those who would twist the sands into ropes, according to the old fable. I see men seeking after higher perfection of purity than they will ever attain. That is the condition of us all, of course, for our ideal must always outrun our realisation, else we may as well lie down and die. But there is a difference between the imperfect approximation, which we feel to be imperfect, and yet feel to be approximation, and the despairing consciousness, that I am sure a great many of my audience have had, more or less, that I have a task set for me that is far beyond my strength. 'Talk about making the tree good! I cannot do it.' So men fold their hands, and the foiled endeavour begets despair. Or, as is the case with some of you, it begets indifference, and you do not care to try any more, because you have tried so often, and have made nothing of it.

There is the problem, how 'make the tree good,' the tree being bad, or, at all events, if you do not like that broad statement, the tree having an element of badness, if I may so say, in and amongst any goodness that it has. I do not care which of the two forms of statement you take, the fact remains the same.

II. Note the universal failure to solve the problem.

'Make the tree good.'

Yes. And there are a whole set of would-be arboriculturists who tell you they will do it if you will trust to them. Let us look at them. First comes one venerable personage. He says, 'I am Law, and I prescribe this, and I forbid that, and I show reward and punishment, and I tell you—be a good man.' Well! what then? It is not for want of telling that men are bad. The worst man in the world knows his duty a great deal more than the best man in the world does it. And whether it is the law of the land, or whether it is the law of society, or the law written in Scripture, or the law written in a man's own heart, they all come under the same fatal disability. They tell us what to do, and they do not put out a finger to help us to do it. A lame man does not get to the city because he sees a guide-post at the turning which tells him which road to take. The people who do not believe in certain modern agitations about the restrictions of the liquor traffic say, 'You cannot make people sober by Act of Parliament,' which is absolutely true, although it does not bear, I think, the inference that they would draw from it, and it just puts into a rough form the fatal weakness of this would-be gardener and improver of the nature of the trees. He tells us our duty, and there an end.

Do you remember how the Apostle put the weakness of law in words, the antique theological terminology of which should not prevent us from seeing the large truth in them? 'If there had been a law given which could have given life, then righteousness should have been by the law,' which being translated into modern English is just this, If Law could impart a power to obey its behests, then it is all that we want to make us right. But until it can do that it fails in

two points. It deals with conduct, and we need to have character dealt with; and it does not lift the burden that it lays on me with one of its fingers. So we may rule *Law* out of court.

And then comes another, and he says, 'I am Culture, and intellectual acquirement; or my name is Education, and I am going to make the tree good in the most scientific fashion, because what makes men bad is that they do not know, and if they only knew they would do the right.' Now, I thoroughly believe that education diminishes crime. I believe it weans from certain forms of evil. I believe that, other things being equal, an educated man, with his larger interests and his cultivated tastes, has a certain fastidiousness developed which keeps him from being so much tempted by the grosser forms of transgression. I believe that very largely you will empty your gaols in proportion as you fill your schools. And let no man say that I am an obscurantist, or that I am indifferent to the value of education and the benefits of intellectual culture, when I declare that all these may be attained, and the nature of the tree remain exactly what it was. You may prune, you may train along the wall, you may get bigger fruit, you will not get better fruit. Did you ever hear the exaggerated line that describes one of the pundits of science as 'the greatest, wisest, meanest of mankind'? The plain fact is that the cultivation of the understanding has little to do with the purifying of the depths of the heart.

And then comes another, and says, 'I am the genius of Beauty and Art. And my recipe is pictures and statues, and all that will refine the mind, and lift the taste.' That is the popular gospel of this day, in a great many quarters. Yes, and have we never heard

of a period in European history which was, as they call it, 'the Renaissance' of art and the death of morality? Do we not know that side by side there have been cultivated in all ages, and are being cultivated to-day, the most exclusive devotion to the beauty that can be expressed by art, and the most intense indifference to the beauty of holiness? Ah! brethren, it wants something far deeper-going than pictures to purge the souls of men. And whilst, as before, I thankfully acknowledge the refining influence of this new cult, I would protest against the absurdity of putting it upon a pedestal as the guide and elevator of corrupted humanity.

And then come others, and they say, 'Environment is the thing that is to blame for it all. How can you get decent lives in the slums?' No, I know you cannot; and God bless every effort made to get the people out of the slums, I say. Only do not let us exaggerate. You cannot change a man, as deeply as we need to be changed, by any change of his circumstances. 'Take the bitter tree,' as I remember an old Jewish saying has it, 'take the bitter tree and plant it in Eden, and water it with the rivers there; and let the angel Gabriel be the gardener, and the tree will still bear bitter fruit.' Are all the people who live in good houses good? Will a 'living wage'—eight shillings a day and eight hours' play—will these change a man's character? Will these go deep enough down to touch the springs of evil? You cannot alter the nature of a set of objects by arranging them in different shapes, parallelograms, or squares, or circles, or any others. As long as you have the elements that are in human nature to deal with, you may do as you like about the distribution of wealth, and the relation

of Capital to Labour, and the various cognate questions which are all included in the vague word Socialism; and human nature will be too strong for you, and you will have the old mischiefs cropping out again. Brethren, you cannot put out Vesuvius by bringing to bear on it the squirts of all the fire engines in creation. The water will go up in steam, and do little or nothing to extinguish the fire. And whilst I would thankfully help in all these other movements, and look for certain limited results of good from them, I, for my part, believe, and therefore I am bound to declare, that neither singly, nor all of them in combination, will they ever effect the change on human nature which Jesus Christ regarded as the only possible means for securing that human nature should bear good fruit.

For, if there were no other reason, there are two plain ones which I only touch. God is the source of all good, of all creatural purity as well as all creatural blessedness. And if a life has a blank wall turned to Him, and has cut itself off from Him, I do not care how you educate it, fill it full of science, plunge it into an atmosphere of art, make the most perfect arrangements for social and economical and political circumstances, that soul is cut off from the possibility of good, because it is cut off from the fontal source of all good. And there is another reason which is closely connected with this, and that is that the true bitter tang in us all is self-centring regard. That is the mother-tincture that, variously coloured and compounded, makes in all the poisonous element that we call sin, and until you get something that will cast that evil out of a man's heart, you may teach and refine and raise him and arrange things for him as you like, and

you will not master the source of all wrong and corrupt fruit.

III. Lastly, let me say a word about the triumphant solution.

Law says, 'Make the tree good,' and does not try to do it. Christ said, 'Make the tree good,' and proceeds to do it. And how does He do it?

He does it by coming to us; to every soul of man on the earth, and offering, first, forgiveness for all the past. I do not know that amongst all the bonds by which evil holds a poor soul that struggles to get away from it, there is one more adamant and unyielding than the consciousness that the past is irrevocable, and that 'what I have written I have written,' and never can blot out. But Jesus Christ deals with that consciousness. It is true that 'whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' and the Christian doctrine of forgiveness does not contradict that solemn truth, but it assures us that God's heart is not turned away from us, notwithstanding the past, and that we can write the future better, and break altogether the fatal bond that decrees, apart from Him, that 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant,' and that past sin shall beget a progeny of future sins. That fruitfulness of sin is at an end, if we take Christ for our Saviour.

He makes the tree good in another fashion still; for the very centre, as it seems to me, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that into our spirits He will breathe a new life kindred with His own, a new nature which is free from the law and bonds of past sin, and of present and future death. The tree is made good because He makes those who believe in Him 'new creatures in Christ Jesus.' Now, do not turn away and

say that that is mysticism. Be it mysticism or not, it is God's truth. It is the truth of the Christian Revelation, that faith in Jesus Christ puts a new nature into any man, however sinful he may have been, and however deep the marks of the fetters may have been upon his limbs.

Christ makes the tree good in yet another fashion, because He brings to the reinforcement of the new life which He imparts the mightiest motives, and sways by love, which leads to the imitation of the Beloved, which leads to obedience to the Beloved, which leads to shunning as the worst of evils anything that would break the communion with the Beloved, and which is in itself the decentralising of the sinful soul from its old centre, and the making of Christ the Beloved the centre round which it moves, and from which it draws radiance and light and motion. By all these methods, and many more that I cannot dwell upon now, the problem is triumphantly solved by Christianity. The tree is made good, and 'instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree.'

You may say, 'That is all very well in theory. What about the practice? I do not see such a mighty difference between you Christians and us.' Well, for myself and my brethren, I accept the rebuke. There is *not* such a difference as there ought to be. But do you know why? Not because our great Gardener cannot change the nature of the plant, but because we do not submit ourselves to His power as we ought to do. Debit us with as many imperfections and inconsistencies as you like, do not lay them to the charge of Christ.

And yet we are willing to accept the test of Christianity which lies in its power to change men. I point to the persecutor on the road to Damascus. I point to the

Bedfordshire tinker, to him that wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*. I point to the history of the Christian Church all down through the ages. I point to our mission fields to-day. I point to every mission hall, where earnest, honest men are working, and where, if you go and ask them, they will let you see people lifted from the very depths of degradation and sin, and made honest, sober, respectable, hard-working, though not very intelligent or refined, Christian people. I suppose that there is no man in an official position like mine who cannot look back over his ministry and remember, some of them dozens, some of them scores, some of them hundreds, of cases in which the change was made on the most hopeless people, by the simple acceptance of the simple gospel, 'Christ died for me, and Christ lives in me.' I know that I can recall such, and I am sure that my brethren can.

People who are not Christians talk glibly about the failure of Christianity to transform men. They have never seen the transformations because they have never put themselves in the way of seeing them. They are being worked to-day; they might be worked here and now.

Try the power of the Gospel for yourselves. You cannot make the tree good, but you can let Jesus Christ do it. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots, but Jesus can do both. 'The lion shall eat straw like the ox.' It is weary work to be tinkering at your acts. Take the comprehensive way, and let Him change your character. I believe that in some processes of dyeing, a piece of cloth, prepared with a certain liquid, is plunged into a vat full of dye-stuffs of one colour, and is taken out tinged of another. The soul, wet with the

waters of repentance, and plunged into the 'Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,' the crimson fountain of the blood of Christ, emerges 'whiter than snow.' Let Him 'make the tree good and fruit will be good,' for if not we shall be 'hewn down and cast into the fire,' because we cannot bear any fruit unto holiness, nor can the end be everlasting life.

'A GREATER THAN JONAS'

'A greater than Jonas is here.'—MATT. xii. 41.

THERE never was any man in his right mind, still more of influence on his fellows, who made such claims as to himself in such unmistakable language as Jesus Christ does. To say such things of oneself as come from His lips is a sign of a weak, foolish nature. It is fatal to all influence, to all beauty of character. It is not only that He claims official attributes as a fanatical or dishonest pretender to inspiration may do. He does that, but He does more—He declares Himself possessed of virtues which, if a man said he had them, it would be the best proof that he did not possess them and did not know himself. 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' 'I am the light of the world'—a 'greater than the temple,' a greater than Jonah, a 'greater than Solomon,' and then withal 'I am meek and lowly of heart.' And the world believes Him, and says, Yes! it is true.

These three comparisons of Jesus with Temple, Jonas, and Solomon, carry great claims and great lessons. By the first Jesus asserts that He is in reality all that the Temple was in shadowy symbol,

and sets Himself above ritual, sacrifices, and priests. By the second he asserts His superiority not only to one prophet but to them all. By the third He asserts His superiority to Solomon, whom the Jews revered as the bright, consummate flower of kingdom.

Now we may take this comparison as giving us positive thoughts about our Lord. The points of comparison may be taken to be three, with Jonah as one of an order, with Jonah in his personal character as a servant of God, with Jonah as a prophet charged with a special work.

I. The prophets and the Son.

The whole prophetic order may fairly be taken as included here. And over against all these august and venerable names, the teachers of wisdom, the speakers of the oracles of God, this Nazarene peasant stands there before Pharisees and Scribes, and asserts His superiority. It is either the most insane arrogance of self-assertion, or it is a sober truth. If it be true that self-consciousness is ever the disease of the soul, and that the religious teacher who begins to think of himself is lost, how marvellous is this assertion!

Compare it with Paul's, 'Unto me who am less than the least of all saints'—'I am not a whit behind the chief of the Apostles'—'though I be nothing'—'Not I, but Christ in me.' And yet this is meekness, for it is infinite condescension in Him to compare Himself with any son of man.

(a) The contrast is suggested between the prophets and the theme of the prophets.

'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' Though undoubtedly the prophet order had other work than prediction to do, yet the soul of their whole work was the announcement of the Messiah.

In testimony whereof, Elijah, who was traditionally the chief of the prophets, stood beside Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and passed away as lost in His light.

(b) The contrast is suggested between the recipients of the word of God and the Word of God.

The relation of the prophets to their message is contrasted with His who was the Truth, who not merely received, but was, the Word of God.

There is nothing in Christ's teaching to show that He was conscious of standing in a human relation to the truths which He spoke. His own personality is ever present in His teaching instead of being suppressed—as in all the prophets. His own personality is His teaching, for His revelation is by being as much as by saying. Similarly, His miracles are done by His own power.

(c) The contrast is suggested between the partial teacher of God's Name and the complete revealer of it.

The foundation was laid by the prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone (Hebrews i. 1).

II. The disobedient prophet and the perfect Son.

Jonah stands as the great example of human weakness in the chosen instruments of God's hand.

Take the story—his shrinking from the message given him. We know not why; but perhaps from faint-hearted fear, or from a sense of his unworthiness and unfitness for the task. His own words about God as long-suffering seem to suggest another reason, that he feared to go with a message of judgment which seemed to him so unlikely to be executed by the long-suffering God. If so, then what made him recreant was not so much fear from personal motives as intellectual perplexity and imperfect comprehension

of the ways of God. Then we hear of his pitiable flight with its absurdity and its wickedness. Then comes the prayer which shows him to have been right and true at bottom, and teaches us that what makes a good man is not the absence of faults, but the presence of love and longing after God. Then we see the boldness of his mission. Then follows the reaction from that lofty height, the petulance or whatever else it was with which he sees the city spared. Even the mildest interpretation cannot acquit him of much disregard for the poor souls whom he had brought to repentance, and of dreadful carelessness for the life and happiness of his fellows.

Now Jonah's behaviour is but a specimen of the vacillations, the alternations of feeling which beset every man; the loftiest, the truest, the best. Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, John the Baptist, Peter, Luther, Cranmer. And it is full of instruction for us.

Then we turn to the contrast in Christ's perfect obedience and faithfulness in His prophetic office. In Him is no trace of shrinking even when the grimness of the Cross weighed most on His heart. No confusion of mind as to the Father's will, or as to the union in Him of perfect righteousness and infinite mercy, ever darkened His clear utterances or cast a shadow over his own soul. He was never weakened by the collapse that follows on great effort or strong emotion. He never failed in his mission through lack of pity.

But there is no need to draw out the comparison. We look on all God's instruments, and see them all full of faults and flaws. Here is one stainless name, one life in which is no blot, one heart in which are no envy, no failings—one obedience which never varied. He says of Himself, 'I do always those things which please

Him,' and we, thinking of all the noblest examples of virtue that the world has ever seen, and seeing in them all some speck, turn to this whole and perfect chrysolite and say, Yes! 'a greater than they!'

III. The bearer of a transitory message of repentance to one Gentile people, and the bearer of an eternal message of grace and love to the whole earth.

Jonah is remarkable as having had the sphere of his activity wholly outside Israel.

The nature of his message; a preaching of punishment; a call to repentance.

The sphere of it—one Gentile city. The effect of it—transitory. We know what Nineveh became.

Jesus is greater than Jonah or any prophet in this respect, that His message is to the world, and in this, that what He preaches and brings far transcends even the loftiest and most spiritual words of any of them.

His voice is sweetest, tenderest, clearest and fullest of all that have ever sounded in men's ears. And just because it is so, the hearing of it brings the most solemn responsibility that was ever laid on men, and to us still more gravely and truly may it be said than to those who heard Jesus speak on earth, 'The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and condemn it.'

'A GREATER THAN SOLOMON'

'A greater than Solomon is here.'—MATT. xii. 42.

IT is condescension in Him to compare Himself with any; yet if any might have been selected, it is that great name. To the Jews Solomon is an ideal figure, who appealed so strongly to popular imagination as to become the centre of endless legends; whose dominion

was the very apex of national glory, in recounting whose splendours the historical books seem to be scarce able to restrain their triumph and pride.

I. The Man.

The story gives us a richly endowed and many-sided character. It begins with lovely, youthful enthusiasm, with a profound sense of his own weakness; with earnest longings after wisdom and guidance. He lived a pure and beautiful youth, and all his earlier and middle life was adorned with various graces. There is a certain splendid largeness about the character. He had a rich variety of gifts: he was statesman, merchant, sage, physicist, builder, one of the many-sided men whom the old world produced. And on this we may build a comparison and contrast.

The completeness of Christ's Humanity transcends all other men, even the most various, and transcends all gathered together. Every type of excellence is in Him. We cannot say that His character is any one thing in special, it falls under no classification. It is a pure white light in which all rays are blended. This all-comprehensiveness and symmetry of character are remarkably shown in four brief records.

But we have to take into account the dark shadows that fell on Solomon's later years. He clearly fell away from his early consecration and noble ideals, and let his sensuous appetites gain power. He countenanced, if he did not himself practise, idolatry. As a king he became an arbitrary tyrant, and his love of building led him to oppress his subjects, and so laid the foundation for the revolt under Jeroboam which rent the kingdom. So his history is another illustration of the possible shipwreck of a great character. It is one more instance of the fall of a 'son of the morning.'

We need not elaborate the contrast with Christ's character. In Him is no falling from a high ideal, no fading of morning glory into a cloudy noon or a lurid evening. There is no black streak in that flawless white marble. Jesus draws the perfect circle, like Giotto's O, while all other lives show some faltering of hand, and consequent irregularity of outline. Greater than Solomon, with his over-clouded glories and his character worsened by self-indulgence, is Jesus, 'the Sun of righteousness,' the perfect round of whose lustrous light is broken by no spots on the surface, no indentations in the circumference, nor obscured by any clouds over its face.

II. The Teacher.

Solomon was traditionally regarded as the author of much of the Book of Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes was written as by him. Possibly the attribution to him of some share in the former book may be correct, but at any rate, his wisdom was said to have drawn the Queen of Sheba to hear him, and that is the point of the comparison of our text.

If we take these two books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes into account, as popularly attributed to him, they suggest points of comparison and contrast with Jesus as a teacher, which we may briefly point out. Now, Proverbs falls into two very distinct portions, the former part being a connected fatherly admonition to the pursuit of wisdom, and the latter a collection of prudential maxims, in which it is rare for any two contiguous verses to have anything to do with each other. In the former part Wisdom is set forth as man's chief good, and the Wisdom which is so set forth is mainly moral wisdom, the right disposition of will and heart, and almost identical with what the Old Testa-

ment elsewhere calls righteousness. But it is invested, as the writer proceeds, with more and more august and queenly attributes, and at last stands forth as being, if not a divine person, at least a personification of a divine attribute.

Bring that ancient teaching and set it side by side with Jesus, and what can we say but that He is what the old writer, be he Solomon or another, dimly saw? He is the 'wisdom' which was traditionally called the 'wisdom of Solomon,' and which the Queen came from far to hear. Jesus is greater, as the light is more than the eye, or as the theme is more than the speaker. 'The power of God and the wisdom of God' is greater than the sage or seer who celebrates it. What is true of Solomon or whoever wrote that praise of Wisdom, is true of all teachers and wise men, they are 'not that light,' they are 'sent to bear witness of that light.' Jesus is Wisdom, other men are wise. Jesus is the greatest teacher, for He teaches us Himself. He is lesson as well as teacher. Unless He was a great deal more than Teacher, He could not be the perfect Teacher for whom the world groans.

The second half of Proverbs is, as I have said, mostly a collection of prudential and moral maxims, with very little reference to God or high ideals of duty in them. They may represent to us the impotence of wise saws to get themselves practised. A guide-post is not a guide. It stretches out its gaunt wooden arms towards the city, but it cannot bend them to help a lame man lying at its foot. Men do not go wrong for lack of knowing the road, nearly so often as for lack of inclination to walk in it. We have abundant voices to tell us what we ought to do. But what we want is the swaying of inclination to do it, and the gift of power to

do it. And it is precisely because Jesus gives us both these that He is what no collection of the wisest sayings can ever be, the efficient teacher of all righteousness, and of the true wisdom which is 'the principal thing.'

As for Ecclesiastes, though not his, it represents not untruly the tone which we may suppose to have characterised his later days in its dwelling on the vanity of life. The sadness of it may be contrasted with the light thrown by the Gospel on the darkest problems. Solomon cries, 'All is vanity' — Jesus teaches His scholars to sing, 'All things work together for good.'

III. The Temple builder.

In this respect 'a greater than Solomon is here,' inasmuch as Jesus is Himself the true Temple, being for all men, which Solomon's structure only shadowed, the meeting-place of God and man, in whom God dwells and through whom we can draw near to Him, the place where the true Sacrifice is once for all offered, by which Sacrifice sin is truly put away. And, further, Jesus is greater than Solomon in that He is, through the ages, building up the great Temple of His Church of redeemed men, the eternal temple of which not one stone shall ever be taken down.

IV. The peaceful King.

There were no wars in Solomon's reign. But a dark shadow brooded over it in its later years, which were darkened by oppression, luxury, and incipient revolt.

Contrast with that merely external and sadly imperfect peacefulness, the deep, inward peace of spirit which Jesus breathes into every man who trusts and obeys Him, and with the peace among men which the acceptance of His rule brings, and will one day bring perfectly, to a regenerated humanity dwelling on a

renewed earth. He is King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace.

Surely from all these contrasts it is plain that 'a greater than Solomon is here.'

FOUR SOWINGS AND ONE RIPENING

'The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. 2. And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 3. And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; 4. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: 5. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: 6. And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: 8. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. 9. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.'—MATT. xiii. 1-9.

THE seven parables of the kingdom, in this chapter, are not to be regarded as grouped together by Matthew. They were spoken consecutively, as is obvious from the notes of time in verses 36 and 53. They are a great whole, setting forth the 'mystery of the kingdom' in its method of establishment, its corruption, its outward and inward growth, the conditions of entrance into it, and its final purification. The sacred number seven, impressed upon them, is the token of completeness. They fall into two parts: four of them being spoken to the multitudes from the boat, and presenting the more obvious aspects of the development of the kingdom; three being addressed to the disciples in the house, and setting forth truths about it more fitted for them.

The first parable, which concerns us now, has been generally called the Parable of the Sower, but he is not the prominent figure. The subject is much rather the soils; and the intention is, not so much to declare anything about him, as to explain to the people, who

were looking for the kingdom to be set up by outward means, irrespective of men's dispositions, that the way of establishing it was by teaching which needed receptive spirits. The parable is both history and prophecy. It tells Christ's own experience, and it foretells His servants'. He is the great Sower, who has 'come forth' from the Father. His present errand is not to burn up thorns or to punish the husbandmen, but to scatter on all hearts the living seed, which is here interpreted, in accordance with the dominant idea of this Gospel, as being 'the word of the kingdom' (ver. 19). All who follow Him, and make His truth known, are sowers in their turn, and have to look for the same issue of their work. The figure is common to all languages. Truth, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual, is seminal, and, deposited in the heart, understanding, or conscience, grows. It has a mysterious vitality, and its issue is not a manufacture, but a fruit. If all teachers, especially religious teachers, would remember that, perhaps there would be fewer failures, and a good deal of their work would be modified. We have here four sowings and one ripening—a sad proportion! We are told that the quantity of seed was in each case the same. Rather we may suppose that much less fell on the wayside, and on the rocky soil, and among the thorns, than on the good ground. So we cannot say that seventy-five per cent. of it was wasted; but, in any case, the proportion of failure is tragically large. This Sower was under no illusion as to the result of His work.

It is folly to sow on the hard footpath, or the rocky ground, or among thorns; but Christ and His servants have to do that, in endless hope that these unreceptive hearts may become good soil. One lesson of the

parable is, Scatter the seed everywhere, on the most unlikely places.

I. Our Lord begins with the case in which the seed remains quite outside the soil, or, without metaphor, in which the word finds absolutely no entrance into the heart or mind. A beaten path runs by the end, or perhaps through the middle, of the cornfield. It is of exactly the same soil as the rest, but many passengers have trodden it hard, and the very foot of the sower, as he comes and goes in his work, has helped. Some of the seed, sown broadcast, of course falls there, and lies where it falls, having no power to penetrate the hard surface. As in our own English cornfields, a flock of bold, hungry birds watch the sower; and, as soon as his back is turned, they are down with a swift-winged swoop, and away goes the exposed grain. So there is an end of it; and the path is as bare as ever, five minutes after it has been strewed with seeds.

The explanation is too plain to be mistaken, but we may briefly touch its main features. Notice, then, that our Lord begins with the case in which there is least contact between His word and the soul, and that, as the contact is least in degree, so it is shortest in duration. A minute or two finishes it. Notice especially that the path has been made hard by external pressure. It is not rock, but soil like the other parts of the field. It represents the case of men whose insensibility to the word is caused by outward things having made a thoroughfare of their natures, and trodden them into incapacity to receive the message of Christ's love. The heavy baggage-wagons of commerce, the light cars of pleasure, merry dancers, and sad funeral processions, have all used that way, and each footfall has beaten the once loose soil a little firmer. We are made in-

sensitive to the gospel by the effect of innocent and necessary things, unless we take care to plough up the path along which they travel, and to keep our spirits susceptible by a distinct effort. How many hearers of every teacher are there, who never take in his words at all, simply because they are so completely pre-occupied!

Notice what becomes of the seed that lies thus bare. 'Immediately,' says Mark, 'Satan cometh.' His agents are these light-winged thoughts that flutter round the hearer as soon as the sermon or the lesson is over. Talk of the weather, criticism of the congregation, or of the sower's attitude as he flung the seed, or politics, or business, drive away the remembrance of even the text, before many of our hearers are out of sight of the church. Then the whirl of traffic begins again, and the path is soon beaten a little harder. If the seed had got ever so little way into the ground, the sharp beaks of the thieves would not have carried it off so easily. Impressions so slight as Christ's word makes on busy men are quickly rubbed out. But if the seed sown vanishes thus swiftly, the fault is not in it, but in ourselves. Satan may seek to snatch it away, but we can hinder him.

Our Lord uses a singular expression, 'This is he that was sown by the way side,' which appears to identify the man with the seed rather than with the soil. It has been suggested by some commentators that this expression is to be regarded as conveying the truth that the seed sown in the heart and growing up there becomes the life-spring of the individual, and that therefore we may speak of him or of it as bearing the fruit. But this explanation will not avail for the case where there is no entrance of the word into the heart,

and so no new birth by the word. More probably we are to regard the expression simply as a conversational shorthand form of speech, not strictly accurate, but quite intelligible.

II. The next variety of soil differs from the preceding in having its hindrance deep seated. Many a hillside in Galilee—as in Scotland or New England—would show a thin surface of soil over rock, like skin stretched tightly on a bone. No roots could get through the rock nor find nourishment in it; while the very shallowness of earth and the heat of the underlying stone would accelerate growth. Such premature and feeble shoots perish as quickly as they spring up; the fierce Eastern sun makes a speedy end of them, and a few days sees their springing and withering. It is a case of 'lightly come, lightly go.' Quick-sprouting herbs are soon-dying herbs. A shallow pond is up in waves under a breeze which raises no sea on the Atlantic, and it is calm again in a few minutes. Readily stirred emotion is transient. Brushwood catches fire easily, and burns itself out quickly. Coal takes longer to kindle, and is harder to put out.

The persons meant are those of excitable temperament, whose feelings lie on the surface, and can be got at without first passing through the understanding or the conscience. Such people are easily played on by the epidemic influence of any prevalent enthusiasm or emotion, as every revival of religion shows. Their very 'joy' in hearing the word is suspicious; for a true reception of it seldom begins with joy, but rather with 'the sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of.' Their immediate reception of it is suspicious, for it suggests that there has been no time to consult the

understanding or to form a deliberate purpose; stable resolutions are slowly formed. It is the sunny side of religion which has attracted them. They know nothing of its difficulties and depths. Hence, as soon as they find out the realities of the course which they have embraced so lightly, they desert, like John Mark running away as soon as home comforts at Cyprus were left behind. The Christian life means self-denial, toil, hard resistance to many fascinations. It means sweat and blood, or it means nothing. Whether there be 'persecution' or no, there will be affliction, 'because of the word,' and all the joyful emotion will ooze out at the man's finger-ends. The same superficial excitability which determined his swift reception of the word will determine his hasty casting of it aside, and immediately he stumbles. All his acts will be done in a hurry, and none of his moods will last. Feeling is in its place down in the engine-room, but it makes a poor pilot. Very significant is that phrase, 'No root in himself.' His roots are in the accidents of the moment. His religion has never really struck root in him, but only in the superficial layer of him. His conscience, will, understanding, are unpenetrated by its fibres. So it is easily pulled up, as well as soon withered.

There is another profound truth in this picture. The hard, impenetrable rock lies right under the thin skin of soil. The nature which is over-emotional on its surface is utterly hard at its core. The most heartless people are those whose feelings are always ready to gush; the most unimpressible are those who are most easily brought to a certain degree of emotion by the sound of the word. This class is an advance on the former, in that there has been a real contact with the word, which has lain longer in their hearts, and has had some

growth. We may regard it as either better or worse than the former, according as we consider that it is better to accept and feel than not to accept at all, or that it is worse to have in some measure possessed and felt than not to have received the word of the kingdom.

III. In one part of the field was a patch where the soil was neither rammed solid, as on the footpath, nor thin, as where the rock cropped out, but where there had been a tangle of thorns, which grow luxuriantly in Palestine. These had been cut down, but not stubbed up, as is plain from the very fact that the seed reached the ground, as also from the description of them as 'springing up.' The two growths advance together. In this case, the seed has a longer life than in the former. It roots and grows, and even, according to the other evangelist's version, fruits, though it does not mature its fruit. There is no question of 'falling away' here. Only the hardier growth, which had the advantage of previous possession, and which pushes up its shoots above ground all round the more tender plant, gets the start of it, and smothers its green blades, overtopping it, and keeping it from sun and air, as well as drawing to itself the nourishment from the soil. The main point here is simultaneousness of the two growths. This man is, as James calls him, a 'double-minded man.' He is trying to grow both corn and thorn on the same soil. He has some religion, but not enough to make thorough work of it. He is endeavouring to ride on two horses at once. Religion says 'either—or'; he is trying 'both—and.' The human heart has only a limited amount of love and trust to give, and Christ must have it all. It has enough for one,—that is, for Him; but not enough for two,—that is, for Him and the world. This man's religion has not been

powerful enough to grub up the roots of the thorns. They were cut down when the seed was sown, for a little while, at the beginning of his course; the new life in him seemed to conquer, but the roots of the old lay hid, and, in due time, showed again above ground. 'Ill weeds grow apace'; and these, as is their nature, grow faster than the good seed. So the only thing to do is to get them out of the ground to the last fibre.

Christ specifies what He deems thorns. We can all understand care being so called; but riches? Yes, they too have sharp prickles, as anybody will find who stuffs a pillow with them. But our Lord chooses His words to point the lesson that not outward things, but our attitude to them, make the barrenness of this soil. It is not 'this world,' but 'the care of this world,' not 'riches,' but 'the deceitfulness of riches,' that choke the word. These two seem opposites, but they are really the same thing on two opposite sides. The man who is burdened with the cares of poverty, and the man who is deceived by the false promises of wealth, are really the same man. The one is the other turned inside out. We make the world our god, whether we worship it by saying, 'I am desolate without thee,' or by fancying that we are secure with it. Note that the issue in this case is—unfruitfulness. The man may, and I suppose usually does, keep up a profession of Christianity all his life. He very likely does not know that the seed is choked, and that he has become unfruitful. But he is a stunted, useless Christian, with all the sap and nourishment of his soul given to his worldly position, and his religion is a poor pining growth, with blanched leaves and abortive fruit. How much of Christ's field is filled with plants of that sort!

IV. The parable tells us nothing about the compara-

tive acreage of the path and the rocky and thorny soils on the one hand, and of the fertile soil on the other. It is not meant to teach the proportion of success to failure, but to exhibit the fact that the reception of the word depends on men's dispositions. The good soil has none of the faults of the rest of the field. It is loose, and thus unlike the path; deep, and thus unlike the rocky bit; clean, and thus unlike the thorn brake. The interpretation given of it by our Lord seems at first sight incomplete. It is all summed up in one word, 'understandeth.' Then, did not the second and third classes, at all events, understand? They received the word, and it had some growth in them. The distinction between them and the good-soil hearer is surely of a moral nature, rather than of so purely intellectual a kind as 'understanding' suggests. Hence, Luke's keep fast 'in an honest and good heart' may seem a more adequate statement. But Biblical usage does not regard 'understanding' as a purely intellectual process, but rather as the action of the whole moral and spiritual nature. It knows nothing of dividing a man up into water-tight compartments, one of which may be full of evil, and the other clean and receptive of good. According to it, we 'understand' religious truth by our hearts and moral nature in conjunction with the dry light of intellect. So the word here is used in a pregnant sense, and includes the grasp of the truth with the whole being, the complete reception of the word of the kingdom not merely into the intellect, but into the central self which is the undivided fountain from which flow the issues of life, whether these be called intellect, or affection, or conscience, or will. Only he who has thus become one with the word, and housed it deep in his inmost soul,

'understands' it, in the sense in which our Lord here uses that expression. 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart' exactly corresponds to the 'understanding' which is here given as the distinctive mark of the good soil.

The result of that reception into the depths of the spirit is that he 'verily beareth fruit.' The man who receives the word is identified with the plant that springs from the seed which he receives. The life of a Christian is the result of the growth in him of a supernatural seed. He bears fruit, yet the fruit comes not from him, but from the seed sown. 'I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Fruitfulness is the aim of the sower, and the test of the reception of the seed. If there is not fruit, manifestly there has been no real understanding of the word. A touchstone, that, which will produce surprising results in detecting spurious Christianity, if it be honestly applied!

There is variety in the degree of fruitfulness, according to the goodness of the soil; that is to say, according to the thoroughness and depth of the reception of the word. The great Husbandman does not demand uniform fertility. He is glad when He gets an hundred-fold, but He accepts sixty, and does not refuse thirty, only He arranges them in descending order, as if He would fain have the highest rate from all the plants, and, not without disappointment, gradually stretches His merciful allowance to take in even the lowest. He will accept the scantiest fruitage, and will lovingly 'purge' the branch 'that it may bring forth more fruit.'

No parable teaches everything. Paths, rocks, and thorns cannot change. But men can plough up the trodden ways, and blast away the rock, and root out the thorns, and, with God's help, can open the door of

their hearts, that the Sower and His seed may enter in. We are responsible for the nature of the soil, else His warning were vain, 'Take heed, therefore, how ye hear.'

EARS AND NO EARS

'Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.'—MATT. xiii. 9.

THIS saying was frequently on our Lord's lips, and that in very various connections. He sometimes, as in the instance before us, appended it to teaching which, from its parabolic form, required attention to disentangle the spiritual truth implied. He sometimes used it to commend some strange, new revolutionary teaching to men's investigation—as, for instance, after that great declaration of the nullity of ceremonial worship, how that nothing could defile a man except what came from his heart. In other connections, which I need not now enumerate, we find it. Like printing a sentence in italics, or underscoring it, this saying calls special attention to the thing uttered. It is interesting to notice that our Lord, like the rest of us, had to use such means of riveting and sharpening the attention of His hearers. There is also a striking reappearance of the expression in the last book of Scripture. The Christ who speaks to the seven churches, from the heavens, repeats His old word spoken on earth, and at the end of each of the letters says once more, as if even the Voice that spoke from heaven might be listened to listlessly, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.'

I. We all have ears.

Now, it is a very singular instance of the superficial,

indolent way in which people are led away by sound rather than by sense, that this saying of my text has often been taken to mean that there is a certain class that can listen, and that it is their business to listen, and there is another class that cannot, and so they are absorbed from all responsibility. The opposite conclusion is the correct one. Everybody has ears, therefore everybody is bound to hear. Which being translated, is that there is not a man or woman among us that has not the capacity of hearing in the sense of understanding, and of hearing in the sense of obeying the word that Jesus Christ speaks to us all. Every one of us, whatever may be our diversities of education, temperament, natural capacity in regard to other subjects of study and apprehension, has the ears that are capable of receiving the message that comes to us all in Jesus Christ.

For what is it that He addresses? Universal human nature, the universal human wants, and mainly and primarily, as I believe, the sense of sin which lies dormant indeed, but capable of being awakened, in all men, because the fact of sin attaches to all men. There is no man but has the needs to which Christ addresses Himself, and no man but has the power of apprehending, of accepting, and of living by, the great Incarnate Word and His message to the world. So that instead of there being a restriction implied in the words before us, there is the broadest implication of the universality of Christ's message. And just as every man comes into the world with a pair of ears on his head, so every man comes into the world with the capacity of listening to, and accepting, that gracious Lord. That is the first thing that our Master distinctly declares here, that we all have ears.

II. If we have ears we are bound to use them.

‘Let him hear.’ In all regions, as I need not remind you, capacity and responsibility go together; and the power that we possess is the measure of the obligation under which we come. All our natural faculties, for instance, are given to us with the implied command, ‘See that you make the best use of them.’ So that even these bodily organs of ours, much more the higher faculties and capacities of the spirit of which the body is partly the symbol and partly the instrument, are intrusted to us on terms of stewardship. And just as it is criminal for a man to go through life with a pair of ears on his head, and a pair of eyes in his forehead, neither of which he educates and cultivates, so is it criminal for a man having the capacity of grasping the great Revelation of God, who ‘at sundry times and in divers manners hath spoken unto the Fathers by the prophets, but in these last days hath spoken unto us by the Son,’ to turn away from that Voice, and pay no heed to it.

It is universally true that obligation goes with capacity. It is especially true with regard to our relation to Jesus Christ. We are all bound to ‘hear Him,’ as the great Voice said on the Mount of Transfiguration. The upshot of all that manifestation of the divine glory welling up from the depths of Christ’s nature, and transfiguring His countenance, the upshot of all that solemn and mysterious communion with the mighty dead, Moses and Elias, the end of all that encompassing glory that wrapped Him, was the Voice from Heaven which proclaimed, ‘This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.’ Moses with his Law, Elijah with his Prophecy, faded away and were lost. But there stood forth singly the one Figure, relieved against the

background of the glory-cloud, the Christ to whom we are all bound to turn with the vision of longing eyes, with the listening of docile ears, with the aspiration of yearning affection, with the submission of absolute obedience.

‘Hear ye Him.’ For just as truly as light is meant for the eye, so truly are the words of the Incarnate Word, and the life which is speech and revelation, meant to be the supreme objects of our attention, of our contemplative regard, and of our practical submission. We are bound to hear because we have ears; and of all the voices that are candidates for our attention, and of all the music that sounds through the universe, no voice is so sweet and weighty, no words so fundamental and all-powerful, no music so melodious, so deep and thunderous, so thrilling and gracious, as are the words of that Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us. We are bound to hear, and we hear to most profit when it is Him that we hear.

III. We shall not hear without an effort.

Christ says in my text, ‘Let him hear,’ as if the possession of the ear did not necessarily involve that there should be hearing. And so it is; ‘Having ears, they hear not,’ is a description verified in a great many other walks of life than in regard to religious matters. But it is verified there in the most conspicuous and in the most tragic fashion. I wonder how many of us there are who, though we have heard with the hearing of the outward ear, have not heard in the sense of attending, have scarcely heard in the sense of apprehending, and have not heard at all in the sense of obeying? Friend, what is it that keeps you from hearing, if you do not hear? Let me run over two or three of the things that thus are like wax in

a man's ears, making him deaf to the message of life in Jesus Christ, in order to bring out how needful it is that these should be counteracted by an effort of will, and the vigorous concentration of thought and heart upon that message.

What is it that keeps men from hearing? Being busy with other things is one hindrance. There is an old story of St. Bernard riding along by a lake on his way to a Council, and being so occupied with thoughts and discussions, that after the day's travel he lifted up his eyes and said, 'Where is the lake?' And so we, many of us, go along all our days on the banks of the great sea of divine love, and we are so busy thinking about other things, or doing other things, that at the end of the journey we do not know that we have been travelling by the side of the flashing waters all the day long. Everybody knows how possible it is to be so engrossed with one's occupations or thoughts as that when the clock strikes in the next steeple, we hear it and do not hear it. We have read of soldiers being so completely absorbed in the fury of the fight that a thunderstorm has rattled over their heads, and no man heard the roll, and no man saw the flash. Many of us are so swallowed up in our trade, in our profession, in our special branch of study, in our occupations and desires, that all the trumpets of Sinai might be blown into our ears, and we should hear them as though we heard them not; and what is worse, that the pleading voice of that great Lord who is ever saying to each of us, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,' passes us by, and produces no effect, any more than does the idle wind whistling through an archway. Brethren, you have the need, the sin,

the weakness, the transiency, to which the Gospel appeals. You have the faculties to which it addresses itself. Jesus Christ is speaking to every one of us. I beseech you to ask yourselves, 'Do I hear Him?' If not, is it not because the clatter of the world's business, or the more refined sounds of some profession or study, have so taken up your attention that you have none to spare for that which requires and repays it most?

Then there is another thing that makes attention, and concentration, and a dead lift of resolution necessary, if you are rightly to hear, and that is the very fact that, superficially, you have heard all your days. You do not know the despair that sometimes comes over men in my position when we face our congregations of people that are familiar to weariness with everything that we have to say, and because they are superficially so familiar with it, fancy that there is no need for them to give heed any more. What can a poor man like me do to get through that crust of familiarity with the mere surface of Christian truth and teaching which is round many of you? You come and listen to me, and say, 'Oh! he has nothing original to say. We have heard it all before.' Yes, your ears have heard it. Have *you* heard? 'Jesus Christ died for me,' you have been told that ever since you were a little child; and so the thousand-and-first, the million-and-first, repetition of it has little power over you. If once, just once, that truth could get through the crust of familiarity, and touch your heart, your bare heart, with its quick naked point of fire-shod love, I think there might be a wound made that would mean healing. But some of you will go away presently, just as you have gone

away a thousand times before, and my words will rebound from you like an india-rubber ball from a wall, or run off you like water from the sea-bird's plumes, just because you think you have heard it all before—and you have never heard it all your days. 'He that hath ears to hear, let him *hear*.'

Then there is another hindrance. A man may put his fingers in his ears. And some of you, I am afraid, are not ignorant of what it is to have made distinct and conscious efforts to get rid of the impressions of religion, and of Christ's voice to us.

And then there are some of us who, out of sheer listlessness, do not hear. It is not because we are too busy. It is not because we have any intellectual objection to the message. It is not because we have made any definite effort to get away from it. It is not even because we have been so accustomed to hear it, that it is impossible to make an impression on our listless indifference. Go down into Morecambe Bay when the tide is making; and, as the water is beginning to percolate through the sand, try to make an impression with a stick upon the tremulous jelly. As soon as you take out the point the impression is lost. And there are many of us like that, who, out of sheer stolid listlessness, retain no fragment of the truth that is sounding in our ears. Dear friends, 'If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, how shall we escape if we'—what? Reject? Deny? Fight against? Angriily repel? No;—'if we *neglect* so great salvation?' That is the question for you negligent people, for you people who think you know all about it and there an end, for you people who are so busy with your daily lives that, amidst the hubbub of earth, heaven's silent voice is inaudible to your ears. Neglect stops the ears

and ruins the man. But you will not hear, though you have ears, unless you make an effort of will and concentration of attention.

IV. And now the last thing that I have to say is:— If we do not hear, we shall become deaf.

That is what Christ said in the context. The sentence which I have taken as my text was spoken at the close of the Parable of the Sower; and when His disciples came and asked Him why He spake in parables, His answer was in effect that the people to whom He spoke had not profited by what they had heard; ‘hearing, they heard not,’ and therefore He spoke in parables which veiled as well as revealed the truth. It was not given to them to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, because they had not given heed to what had been made known to them. The great law was taking effect which gives to him that has and takes from him that has not; and that law applied not only to the form of Christ’s teaching, but also to the faculty of receiving it. That diminished capacity is sometimes represented as men’s own act, and sometimes as the divinely inflicted penalty of not hearing, but in either case the same fact is in view—namely, the loss of susceptibility by neglect, the dying-out of faculties by disuse.

Just as in the bodily life capacities untrained and unexercised become faint and disappear; just as the Indian *fakir*, who holds his arm up above his head for years, never using the muscles, has the muscles atrophied, and at last cannot bring his arm down to his side;—so the people who neglect to use the ears that God has given them by degrees will lose the capacity of hearing at all. Which, being put into plain English, just comes to this: that if we do not listen to Jesus Christ when He calls to us in His love, we shall

gradually have the capacity of hearing diminished until—I do not know if it ever reaches that point here—until its ultimate extinction.

Dear friends, this word of the love and pity and pardon and purifying power of God manifest in Jesus Christ for us all, which I am trying to preach to you now, is not without an effect even on the men by whom it is most superficially and perfunctorily heard. It either softens or hardens. As the old mystics used to say, the same heat that melts wax hardens clay into brick. The same light that brings blessing to one eye brings pain to another. You have heard, and hearing you have not heard; and you will cease to be able to hear at all; and then the thunders may rattle over your heads, and be inaudible to you; and that Voice which is as loud as the sound of many waters, and sweet as harpers harping on their harps, and which says to each of us, 'Come to Me, and I will be thy peace and thy rest and thy strength,' will no more be audible in your atrophied ears. Dear friends! I do not know, as I have said, whether that ultimate tragic result is ever wholly reached in this world. I am sure that it is not reached with some of you as yet. And I beseech you to obey that voice which says, 'This is My beloved Son; hear Him,' and to let there not be only outward hearing, but to let there be inward acceptance, attention, apprehension, and obedience. And then we shall be able to say, 'Blessed are our ears, for they hear; blessed are our eyes, for they see.' 'Many prophets and righteous men desired to hear the things that ye hear, and heard them not,' take care that, since you are thus advanced in the outward possession of the perfect word of God, there be also the yielding to, and reception of it.

‘TO HIM THAT HATH SHALL BE GIVEN’

‘Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.’—
MATT. xiii. 12.

THERE are several instances in the Gospels of our Lord’s repetition of sayings which seem to have been, if we may use the expression, favourites with Him; as, for instance, ‘There are first which shall be last, and there are last which shall be first’; or, again, ‘The servant is not greater than his master, nor the disciple than his lord.’ My text is one of these. It is here said as part of the explanation why He chose to speak in parables, in order that the truth, revealed to the diligent and attentive, might be hidden from the careless. Again, we find it in two other Gospels, in a somewhat similar connection, though with a different application, where Jesus enunciates it as the basis of His warning, ‘Take heed how’—or, in another version, ‘what’—‘ye hear.’ Again He employs it in this Gospel in the parable of the talents, as explaining the principle on which the retribution to the slothful servant was meted out. And we find it yet once more in the parable of the pounds in Luke’s Gospel, which, though entirely different in conception and purpose from that of the talents, is identical in the portion connected with the slothful servant.

So there are two very distinct directions in which this saying looks, as it was used by our Lord—one in reference to the attitude of men towards the Revelation of God, and one in reference to the solemn subject of future retribution. I wish, now, mainly to try and illustrate the great law which is set forth here, and to follow out the various spheres of its operation, and

estimate the force of its influence. For I think that large and very needful lessons for us all may be drawn therefrom. The principle of my text shapes all life. It is a paradox, but it is a deep truth. It sounds harsh and unjust, but it contains the very essence of righteous retribution. The paradox is meant to spur attention, curiosity, and inquiry. The key to it lies here—to use is to have. There is a possession which is no possession. That I have rights of property in a thing, as contradistinguished to your rights, does not make it in any deep and real sense mine. What I use I have; and all else is, as one of the other evangelists has it, but 'seeming' to have.

So much, then, by way of explanation of our text. Now, let me ask you to look with me into two or three of the regions where we shall find illustrations of its working.

I. Take the application of this principle to common life.

The lowest instance is in regard to material possessions. It is a complaint that is made against the present social arrangements and distribution of wealth, that money makes money; that wealth has a tendency to clot; the rich man to get richer, and the poor man to get poorer. Just as in a basin of water when the plug is out, and circular motion is set up, the little bits of foreign matter that may be there all tend to get together, so it is in regard to these external possessions. 'To him that hath shall be given'; and people grumble about that and say, 'It never rains but it pours, and the man that needs more money least gets it most easily.' Of course. Treasure used grows; treasure hoarded rusts and dwindles. The millionaire will double his fortune by a successful speculation. The man with half a

dozen large shops drives the poor little tradesman out of the field. So it is all round: 'To him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not shall be taken even that he hath.'

Next, go a step higher. Look at how this law works in regard to powers of body. That is a threadbare old illustration. The blacksmith's arm we have all heard about; the sailor's eye, the pianist's wrist, the juggler's fingers, the surgeon's deft hand—all these come by use. 'To him that hath shall be given.' And the same man who has cultivated one set of organs to an almost miraculous fineness or delicacy or strength will, by the operation of the other half of the same principle, have all but atrophied another set. So with the blacksmith's arm, which has grown muscular at the expense of his legs. Part of the physical frame has monopolised what might have been distributed throughout the whole. Use is strength; use makes growth. We have what we employ. And even in regard to our bodily frame the organs that we do not use we carry about with us rather as a weight attached to us than as a possession.

Again, come a little higher. This great principle largely goes to determine our position in the world and our work. The man that can do a thing gets it to do. In the long run the tools come to the hand that can use them. So here is one medical man's consulting-room crammed full of patients, and his neighbour next door has scarcely one. The whole world runs to read *A's*, *B's*, or *C's* books. The briefless barrister complains that there is no middle course between having nothing to do and being overwhelmed with briefs. 'To him that hath shall be given'—the man can do a thing, and he gets it to do—'and from him that hath

not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' That law largely settles every man's place in the world.

Let us come still higher. The same law has much—not all, but much—to do in making men's characters. For it operates in its most intense fashion, and with results most blessed or most disastrous, in the inner life. The great example that I would adduce is conscience. Use it, obey it, listen for its voice, never thwart it, and it grows and grows and grows, and becomes more and more sensitive, more and more educated, more and more sovereign in its decisions. Neglect it, still more, go in its teeth, and it dwindles and dwindles and dwindles; and I suppose it is possible—though one would fain hope that it is a very exceptional case—for a man, by long-continued indifference to the voice within that says 'Thou shalt' or 'Thou shalt not,' to come at last to never hearing it at all, or to its never speaking at all. It is 'seared as with a hot iron,' says one of the Apostles; and in seared flesh there is no feeling any more. Are any of you, dear friends, bringing about such a state? Are you doing what you know you ought not to do? Then you will be less and less troubled as the days go on; and, by neglecting the voice, you will come at last to be like the profligate woman in the book of Proverbs, who, after her sin, 'wipes her mouth and says, I have done no harm.' Do you think *that* is a desirable state—to put out the eyes of your soul, to stifle what is the truest echo of God's voice that you will ever hear? Do you not think that it would be wiser to get the blessed half of this law on your side, instead of the dreadful one? Listen to that voice. Never, as you value yourselves, neglect it.

Cultivate the habit of waiting for its monitions, its counsels prohibitory or commendatory, and then you will have done much to secure that your spirit shall be enriched by the operations of this wide-spread law.

Take another illustration. People who, by circumstances, are placed in some position of dependence and subordination, where they have seldom to exercise the initiative of choice, but just to do what they are bid, by degrees all but lose the power of making up their minds about anything. And so a slave set free is proverbially a helpless creature, like a bit of driftwood; and children who have been too long kept in a position of pupilage and subordination, when they are sent into the world are apt to turn out very feeble men, for want of a good, strong backbone of will in them. So, many a woman that has been accustomed to leave everything in her husband's hands, when the clods fall on his coffin finds herself utterly helpless and bewildered, just because in the long, happy years she never found it necessary to exercise her own judgment or her own will about practical matters.

So do not get into the habit of letting circumstances settle what you are to do, or you will lose the power of dominating them, before very long. And if a man for years leaves himself, as it were, to be guided by the stream of circumstances, like long green weeds in a river, he will lose the power of determining his own fate, and the Will will die clean out of him. Cultivate it, and it will grow.

Again, this same principle largely settles our knowledge, our convictions, the operations and the furniture of our understandings. If a man holds any truth slackly, or in the case of truths that are meant to influence life and conduct, does not let it influence

these, then that is a kind of having truth that is sure to end in losing it. If you want to lose your convictions grasp them loosely—do not act upon them, do not take them for guides of your life—and they will soon relieve you of their unwelcome presence. If you wish mind and knowledge to grow, grip with a grip of iron what you do know, and let it dominate you, as it ought. He that truly *has* his learning will learn more and pile by slow degrees stone upon stone, until the building is complete.

So, dear friends, here, in these illustrations, which might have been indefinitely enlarged, we see the working of a principle which has much to do in making men what they are. What you use you increase, what you leave unused you lose. There are grey heads in my present audience who, when they were young men, had dreams and aspirations that they bitterly smile at now. There are men here who began life with possibilities that have never blossomed or fruited, but have died on the stem. Why? Because they were so much occupied with the vulpine craft of making their position and their 'pile,' that generous emotions and noble sympathies and lofty aspirations, intellectual or otherwise, were all neglected, and so they are dead; and the men are the poorer incalculably, because of what has thus been shed away from them. You make your characters by the parts of yourselves that you choose to cultivate and employ. Do you think that God gave us whatever of an intellectual and emotional and moral kind is in us, in order that it might be all used up in our daily business? A very much scantier outfit would have done for all that is wanted for that. But there are abortive and dormant organs in your spiritual nature, as there are in the corporeal, which

tell you what you were meant for, and which it is your sin to leave undeveloped. Brethren, the law of my text shapes us in the two ways, that whatever we cultivate, be it noble or be it bestial, will grow, and whatever we repress or neglect will die. Choose which of the two halves of yourselves you will foster, and on which you will frown.

So much, then, for the first general application of these words. Now let me turn for a moment to another.

II. I would note, secondly, the application of this two-fold law in regard to God's revelation of Himself.

That is the bearing of it in the immediate context from which our text is taken. Our Lord explains that teaching by parable—a transparent veil over a truth—was adopted in order that the veiled truth might be a test as well as a revelation. And although I do not believe that the Christian revelation has been made in any degree less plain and obvious than it could have been made, I cannot but recognise the fact that the necessities of the case demand that, when God speaks to us, He should speak in such a fashion as that it is possible to say, 'Tush! It is not God that is speaking; it is only Eli!' and so to turn about the young Samuel's mistake the other way. I do not believe that God has diminished the evidence of His Revelation in order to try us; but I do maintain that the Revelation which He has made does come to us, and must come to us, in such a form as that, not by mathematical demonstration but by moral affinity, we shall be led to recognise and to bow to it. He that will be ignorant, let him be ignorant, and he that will come asking for truth, it will flood his eyeballs with a blessed illumination. The veil will but make more attractive to some eyes

the outlines of the fair form beneath it, whilst others are offended at it and say, 'Unless we see the truth undraped, we will not believe that it is truth at all.'

So, brethren, let me remind you—what is really but a repetition in reference to another subject of what I have already said,—that in regard to God's speech to men, and especially in regard to what I, for my part, believe to be the complete and ultimate and perfect speech of God to men, in Jesus Christ our Saviour, the principle of my text holds good.

'To him that hath shall be given.' If you will make that truth your own by loyal faith and honest obedience, if you will grapple it to your heart, then you will learn more and more. Whatever tiny corner of the great whole you have grasped, hold on by that and draw it into yourselves, and you will by degrees get the entire, glorious, golden web to wrap round you. 'If any man wills to do His will he shall know.' That is Christ's promise; and it will be fulfilled to us all. 'To him that hath shall be given.'

If, on the other hand, you 'have' Christian truth and Christ, who is the Truth, in the fashion in which so many of us have it and Him, as a form, as a mere intellectual possession, so that we can, when we go to church, repeat the creed without feeling that we are telling a lie, but that when we go to market we do not carry the Commandments with us—if that is our Christianity, then it will dribble away into nothing. We shall not be much the poorer for the loss of such a sham possession, but it will go. It drops out of the hands that are not clasped to hold it. It is just that a thing so neglected shall some day be a thing withdrawn. So in regard to Revelation and a man's perception and reception of it, my text holds good in both its halves.

III. Lastly, look at the application of these words in the future.

That is our Lord's own application of them, twice out of the five times in which the saying appears in the three Gospels: in the parable of the talents and in the parallel portion of the parable of the pounds. I do not venture into the regions of speculation about that future, but from the words before us there come clearly enough two aspects of it. The man with the ten talents received more; the man that had hid the talent or the pound in the ground was deprived of that which he had not used.

Now, with regard to the former there is no difficulty in translating the representations of the parables, sustained as they are by distinct statements of other portions of Scripture. They come to this, that, for the life beyond, indefinite progress in all that is noble and blessed and Godlike in heart and character, in intellect and power, are certain; that faith, hope, love, here cultivated but putting forth few blossoms and small fruitage, there, in that higher house where these be planted, will flourish in the courts of the Lord, and will bear fruit abundantly; that here the few things faithfully administered will be succeeded yonder by the many things royally ruled over; that here one small coin, as it were, is put into our palm—namely the present blessedness and peace and strength and purity of a Christian life; and that yonder we possess the inheritance of which what we have here is but the earnest. It used to be the custom when a servant was hired for the next term-day to give him one of the smallest coins of the realm as what was called 'arles'—wages in advance, to seal the bargain. Similarly, in buying an estate a bit of turf was passed over to the

purchaser. We get the earnest here of the broad acres of the inheritance above. 'To him that hath shall be given.'

And the other side of the same principle works in some terrible ways that we cannot speak about. 'From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.' I have spoken of the terrible analogy to this solemn prospect which is presented us by the imperfect experiences of earth. And when we see in others, or discover in ourselves, how it is possible for unused faculties to die entirely out, I think we shall feel that there is a solemn background of very awful truth, in the representation of what befell the unfaithful servant. Hopes unnourished are gone; opportunities unimproved are gone, capacities undeveloped are gone; fold after fold, as it were, is peeled off the soul, until there is nothing left but the naked self, pauperised and empty-handed for evermore. 'Take it from him'; he never was the better for it; he never used it; he shall have it no longer.

Brethren, cultivate the highest part of yourselves, and see to it that, by faith and obedience, you truly have the Saviour, whom you have by the hearing of the ear and by outward profession. And then death will come to you, as a nurse might to a child that came in from the fields with its hands full of worthless weeds and grasses, to empty them in order to fill them with the flowers that never fade. You can choose whether Death—and Life too, for that matter—shall be the porter that will open to you the door of the treasure-house of God, or the robber that will strip you of misused opportunities and unused talents.

SEEING AND BLIND

‘ They seeing, see not.’—MATT. xiii. 13.

THIS is true about all the senses of the word ‘seeing’; there is not one man in ten thousand who sees the things before his eyes. Is not this the distinction, for instance, of the poet or painter, and man of science—just that they do see? How true is this about the eye of the mind, what a small number really understand what they know! But these illustrations are of less moment than the saddest example—religious indifference. I wish to speak about this now, and to ask you to consider—

- I. The extent to which it prevails.
- II. The causes from which it springs.
- III. The fearful contrasts it suggests.
- IV. The end to which it conducts.

I. The extent to which it prevails.

I have no hesitation in saying that it is the condition of by far the largest proportion of our nation. It is the true enemy of souls. I do not believe that any large proportion of Englishmen are actual disbelievers, who reject Christianity as unworthy of credence, or attach themselves to any of the innumerable varieties of deistical and pantheistical schools. I am not saying at present whether it would be a more or less hopeful state if it were so, but only that it is not so, and that a complacent taking for granted of religious truth, a torpor of soul, an entire carelessness about God and Christ, and the whole mighty scheme of the Gospel, is the characteristic of many in all classes of English society.

We have it here in our churches and chapels as the first foe we have to fight with. Disbelief slays its thousands, and dissipation its tens of thousands, but this sleek, well-to-do carelessness, its millions. As some one says, it is as if an opium sky had rained down soporifics.

II. The causes from which it springs.

Of course, the great cause of this condition is man's evil heart of alienation, the spirit of slumber—but we may find proximate and special causes.

There is the indifference springing from the absorbing interests of the present. A man has only a certain quantity of interest to put forth. If he expends it all on small things, he has none for great. This overmastering, overshadowing present draws us all to itself, and we have no power of attention or interest to spare for anything else, or for reflection upon Christian truth in connection with our own conduct.

Then there is the indifference caused by fear of what the results of attention might be. It is sometimes broken in upon, and men are in danger of having their eyes opened, then with an effort they fling themselves into some distraction, and sleep again. As the text says, 'Their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes.'

Then there is the indifference fed by an indolent acquiescence in the truth. That is a favourite way of breaking the force of all unwelcome moral truth, and especially of the Gospel. A man says, 'Oh yes, it is true,' and because it is, therefore he thinks he has done enough when he has acknowledged it. Many do not seem to dream that the Word has any personal application to them at all.

Then there is the indifference which comes from long

familiarity with the truth. It is this which haunts our congregations and makes it so impossible to get at many who know all our message already. You can tell them nothing they do not know. As with men who live by a forge, the sound of the blow of the hammer only lulls them to sleep. The Gospel is so familiar to them that there is no longer any power about it. The vulgar emotion of wonder is not excited, and the other of love and admiration has not taken its place.

Men who live in mountain scenery do not know its beauties, and as with all other operations of the listless eye so with this, the old is deemed to be uninteresting, and the common is the commonplace. As even in the piece of earth that you have trodden on longest, you would find marvels that you do not dream of if you would look, so here. You have heard too much and reflected too little. Oh, brethren, it oppresses a man who has to speak to you when he reflects how often you have heard it all, how the flow of the river only seems to have worn your souls smooth enough to let it glide past without one stoppage.

III. The contrasts it suggests.

Contrast the indolence here with the earnestness in life. The same men who sit with faces stolid and expressionless over a sermon—meet them on Monday morning! They go to sleep at prayer or over a Bible, but see them in a bargain or over a ledger. Think of what powers of intense love, yea, of almost fearful devotion and energy, lie in us, ay and come out of us, and then think how poor, how cold we are here, and we may well be ashamed. It is as if a burning mountain with its cataract of fire were suddenly quenched and locked in everlasting frost, and all the flaming glory running down its heaving sides turned into a

slow glacier. There comes ice instead of fire, frost instead of flame, snow instead of sparks. It is as if some magician waved a wand and stiffened men into a paralysis. Religion seems to numb men instead of inspiring them. It is an awful thought of how they serve themselves and the world, how they can love one another, how they can be stirred to noble enthusiasm, and how little of all this ever comes to God.

Contrast the indifference of the men and the awfulness of the things they are indifferent about. God—Christ—their souls—heaven—hell. The grandest things men can think about, the mightiest realities in the universe, the eternal, the most powerful, these it is which some of you, seeing, see not.

Contrast men's indifference and the earnestness of the rest of the creation. God rose early and sent His prophets. He so loved the world that He gave His Son. Christ died, lives, works, rules, expects, beseeches. Angels desire to look into the wonders that you 'seeing, see not.' What makes heaven fill with rapture, and flash through all her golden glories with light, what makes hell look on with the lurid scowl of baffled malignity, that is what *you* are careless about. My friend, you and other men like you are the only beings in the universe careless about the salvation of your souls.

IV. The end to which it conducts.

That end is certain ruin. Ah, dear friends, you do not need to do much to ruin your own souls. You have only to continue indifferent and you will do it effectually. Negligence is quite enough. Ruin is what it will certainly end in.

And remember that when the possibility of salvation ends, your indifference will end too. The poor toad that is fascinated by the serpent, and drops

powerless into the cruel jaws, wakes from the stupor when it feels the pang. And the lifelong torpor will be dissolved for you when you pass into another world. What an awful awaking that will be when men look back and see by the light of eternity what they were doing here! Oh! friends, would to God that any poor word of mine could rouse you from this drugged and opiate sleep! Believe me, it is merciful violence which would rouse you. Anything rather than that the poison should work on till the heavy slumber darkens into death. Let me implore you, as you value your own souls, as you would not fling away your most precious jewel to 'awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' Beware of the treacherous indifference which creeps on, till, like men in the Arctic regions, the sleepers die.

MINGLED IN GROWTH, SEPARATED IN MATURITY

'Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: 25. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. 26. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. 27. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? 28. He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29. But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 30. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.'—MATT. xiii. 24-30.

THE first four parables contained in this chapter were spoken to a miscellaneous crowd on the beach, the last three to the disciples in the house. The difference of audience is accompanied with a diversity of subject. The former group deals with the growth of the kingdom, as it might be observed by outsiders, and especi-

ally with aspects of the growth on which the multitude needed instruction; the latter, with topics more suited to the inner circle of followers. Of these four, the first three are parables of vegetation; the last, of assimilation. The first two are still more closely connected, inasmuch as the person of the sower is prominent in both, while he is not seen in the others. The general scenery is the same in both, but with a difference. The identification of the seed sown with the persons receiving it, which was hinted at in the first, is predominant in the second. But while the former described the various results of the seed, the latter drops out of sight the three failures, and follows its fortunes in honest and good hearts, showing the growth of the kingdom in the midst of antagonistic surroundings. It may conveniently be considered in three sections: the first teaching how the work of the sower is counter-worked by his enemy; the second, the patience of the sower with the thick-springing tares; and the third, the separation at the harvest.

I. The work of the sower counter-worked by his enemy, and the mingled crops.

The peculiar turn of the first sentence, 'The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed,' etc., suggests that the main purpose of the parable is to teach the conduct of the king in view of the growth of the tares. The kingdom is concentrated in Him, and the 'likening' is not effected by the parable, but, as the tenses of both verbs show, by the already accomplished fact of His sowing. Our Lord veils His claims by speaking of the sower in the third person; but the hearing ear cannot fail to catch the implication throughout that He Himself is the sower and the Lord of the harvest. The field is 'his field,' and His own

interpretation tells us that it means 'the world.' Whatever view we take of the bearing of this parable on purity of communion in the visible Church, we should not slur over Christ's own explanation of 'the field,' lest we miss the lesson that He claims the whole world as His, and contemplates the sowing of the seed broadcast over it all. The Kingdom of Heaven is to be developed on, and to spread through, the whole earth. The world belongs to Christ not only when it is filled with the kingdom, but before the sowing. The explanation of the good seed takes the same point of view as in the former parable. What is sown is 'the word'; what springs from the seed is the new life of the receiver. Men become children of the kingdom by taking the Gospel into their hearts, and thereby receive a new principle of growth, which in truth becomes themselves.

Side by side with the sower's beneficent work the counter-working of 'his enemy' goes on. As the one, by depositing holy truth in the heart, makes men 'children of the kingdom,' the other, by putting evil principles therein, makes men 'children of evil.' Honest exposition cannot eliminate the teaching of a personal antagonist of Christ, nor of his continuous agency in the corruption of mankind. It is a glimpse into a mysterious region, none the less reliable because so momentary. The sulphurous clouds that hide the fire in the crater are blown aside for an instant, and we see. Who would doubt the truth and worth of the unveiling because it was short and partial? 'The devil is God's ape.' His work is a parody of Christ's. Where the good seed is sown, there the evil is scattered thickest. False Christs and false apostles dog the true like their shadows. Every

truth has its counterfeit. Neither institutions, nor principles, nor movements, nor individuals, bear unmingled crops of good. Not merely creatural imperfection, but hostile adulteration, marks them all. The purest metal oxidises, scum gathers on the most limpid water, every ship's bottom gets foul with weeds. The history of every reformation is the same: radiant hopes darkened, progress retarded, a second generation of dwarfs who are careless or unfaithful guardians of their heritage.

There are, then, two classes of men represented in the parable, and these two are distinguishable without doubt by their conduct. Tares are said to be quite like wheat until the heads show, and then there is a plain difference. So our Lord here teaches that the children of the kingdom and those of evil are to be discriminated by their actions. We need not do more than point in a sentence to His distinct separation of men (where the seed of the kingdom has been sown) into two sets. Jesus Christ holds the unfashionable, 'narrow' opinion that, at bottom, a man must either be His friend or His enemy. We are too much inclined to weaken the strong line of demarcation, and to think that most men are neither black nor white, but grey.

The question has been eagerly debated whether the tares are bad men in the Church, and whether, consequently, the mingled crop is a description of the Church only. The following considerations may help to an answer. The parable was spoken, not to the disciples, but to the crowd. An instruction to them as to Church discipline would have been signally out of place; but they needed to be taught that the kingdom was to be 'a rose amidst thorns,' and to grow

up among antagonisms which it would slowly conquer, by the methods which the next two parables set forth. This general conception, and not directions about ecclesiastical order, was suited to them. Again, the designation of the tares as 'the children of evil' seems much too wide, if only a particular class of evil men—namely, those who are within the Church—are meant by it. Surely the expression includes all, both in and outside the Church, who 'do iniquity.' Further, the representation of the children of the kingdom, as growing among tares in the field of the world, does not seem to contemplate them as constituting a distinct society, whether pure or impure; but rather as an indefinite number of individuals, intermingled in a common soil with the other class. 'The kingdom of heaven' is not a synonym for the Church. Is it not an anachronism to find the Church in the parable at all? No doubt, tares are in the Church, and the parable has a bearing on it; but its primary lesson seems to me to be much wider, and to reveal rather the conditions of the growth of the kingdom in human society.

II. We have the patience of the husbandman with the quick-springing tares.

The servants of the householder receive no interpretation from our Lord. Their question is silently passed by in His explanation. Clearly then, for some reason, He did not think it necessary to say any more about them; and the most probable reason is, that they and their words have no corresponding facts, and are only introduced to lead up to the Master's explanation of the mystery of the growth of the tares, and to His patience with it. The servants cannot be supposed to represent officials in the Church, without hopelessly

destroying the consistency of the parable; for surely all the children of the kingdom, whatever their office, are represented in the crop. Many guesses have been made,—apostles, angels, and so on. It is better to say ‘The Lord hath not showed it me.’

The servant’s first question expresses, in vivid form, the sad, strange fact that, where good was sown, evil springs. The deepest of all mysteries is the origin of evil. Explain sin, and you explain everything. The question of the servants is the despair of thinkers in all ages. Heaven sows only good; where do the misery and the wickedness come from? That is a wider and sadder question than, How are churches not free from bad members? Perhaps Christ’s answer may go as far towards the bottom of the bottomless as those of non-Christian thinkers, and, if it do not solve the metaphysical puzzles, at any rate gives the historical fact, which is all the explanation of which the question is susceptible.

The second question reminds us of ‘Wilt Thou that we command fire . . . from heaven, and consume them?’ It is cast in such a form as to put emphasis on the householder’s will. His answer forbidding the gathering up of the tares is based, not upon any chance of mistaking wheat for them, nor upon any hope that, by forbearance, tares may change into wheat, but simply on what is best for the good crop. There was a danger of destroying some of it, not because of its likeness to the other, but because the roots of both were so interlaced that one could not be pulled up without dragging the other after it.

Is this prohibition, then, meant to forbid the attempt to keep the Church pure from un-Christian members? The considerations already adduced are valid in answer-

ing this question, and others may be added. The crowd of listeners had, no doubt, many of them, been influenced by John the Baptist's fiery prophecies of the King who should come, fan in hand, to 'purge His floor,' and were looking for a kingdom which was to be inaugurated by sharp separation and swift destruction. Was not the teaching needed then, as it is now, that that is not the way in which the kingdom of heaven is to be founded and grow? Is not the parable best understood when set in connection with the expectations of its first hearers, which are ever floating anew before the eyes of each generation of Christians? Is it not Christ's *apologia* for His delay in filling the *rôle* which John had drawn out for him? And does that conception of its meaning make it meaningless for us? Observe, too, that the rooting up which is forbidden is, by the proprieties of the emblem, and by the parallel which it must necessarily afford to the final burning, something very solemn and destructive. We may well ask whether excommunication is a sufficiently weighty idea to be taken as its equivalent. Again, how does the interpretation which sees ecclesiastical discipline here comport with the reason given for letting the tares grow on? By the hypothesis in the parable, there is no danger of mistake; but is there any danger of casting out good men from the Church along with the bad, except through mistake? Further, if this parable forbids casting manifestly evil men out of the Church, it contradicts the divinely appointed law of the Church as administered by the apostles. If it is to be applied to Church action at all, it absolutely forbids the separation from the Church of any man, however notoriously un-Christian, and that, as even the strongest advocates

of comprehension admit, would destroy the very idea of the Church. Surely an interpretation which lands us in such a conclusion cannot be right. We conclude, then, that the intermingling which the parable means is that of good men and bad in human society, where all are so interwoven that separation is impossible without destroying its whole texture; that the rooting up, which is declared to be inconsistent with the growth of the crop, means removal from the field, namely, the world; that the main point of the second part of the parable is to set forth the patience of the Lord of the harvest, and to emphasise this as the law of the growth of His kingdom, that it advances amidst antagonism; and that its members are interlaced by a thousand rootlets with those who are not subjects of their King. What the interlacing is for, and whether tares may become wheat, are no parts of its teaching. But the lesson of the householder's forbearance is meant to be learned by us. While we believe that the scope of the parable is wider than instruction in Church discipline, we do not forget that a fair inference from it is that, in actual churches, there will ever be a mingling of good and evil; and, though that fact is no reason for giving up the attempt to make a church a congregation of faithful men, and of such only, it is a reason for copying the divine patience of the sower in ecclesiastical dealings with errors of opinion and faults of conduct.

III. The final separation at the harvest.

The period of development is necessarily a time of intermingling, in which, side by side, the antagonistic principles embodied in their representatives work themselves out, and beneficially affect each other. But each grows towards an end, and, when it has been reached,

the blending gives place to separation. John's prophecy is plainly quoted in the parable, which verbally repeats his 'gather the wheat into his barn,' and alludes to his words in the other clause about burning the tares. He was right in his anticipations; his error was in expecting the King to wield His fan at the beginning, instead of at the end of the earthly form of His kingdom. At the consummation of the allotted era, the bands of human society are to be dissolved, and a new principle of association is to determine men's place. Their moral and religious affinities will bind them together or separate them, and all other ties will snap. This marshalling according to religious character is the main thought of the solemn closing words of the parable and of its interpretation, in which our Lord presents Himself as directing the whole process of judgment by means of the 'angels' who execute His commands. They are 'His angels,' and whatever may be the unknown activity put forth by them in the parting of men, it is all done in obedience to Him. What stupendous claims Jesus makes here! What becomes of the tares is told first in words awful in their plainness, and still more awful in their obscurity. They speak unmistakably of the absolute separation of evil men from all society but that of evil men; of a close association, compelled, and perhaps unwelcome. The tares are gathered out of 'His kingdom,'—for the field of the world has then all become the kingdom of Christ. There are two classes among the tares: men whose evil has been a snare to others (for the 'things that offend' must, in accordance with the context, be taken to be persons), and the less guilty, who are simply called 'them that do iniquity.'

Perhaps the 'bundles' may imply assortment accord-

ing to sin, as in Dante's circles. What a bond of fellowship that would be! '*The furnace*,' as it is emphatically called by eminence, burns up the bundles. We may freely admit that the fire is part of the parable, but yet let us not forget that it occurs not only in the parable, but in the interpretation; and let us learn that the prose reality of 'everlasting destruction,' which Christ here solemnly announces, is awful and complete. For a moment He passes beyond the limits of that parable, to add that terrible clause about 'weeping and gnashing of teeth,' the tokens of despair and rage. So spoke the most loving and truthful lips. Do we believe His warnings as well as His promises?

The same law of association according to character operates in the other region. The children of the kingdom are gathered together in what is now 'the kingdom of My Father,' the perfect form of the kingdom of Christ, which is still His kingdom, for 'the throne of God and of the Lamb,' the one throne on which both sit to reign, is 'in it.' Freed from association with evil, they are touched with a new splendour, caught from Him, and blaze out like the sun; for so close is their association, that their myriad glories melt as into a single great light. Now, amid gloom and cloud, they gleam like tiny tapers far apart; then, gathered into one, they flame in the forehead of the morning sky, 'a glorious church, not having spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing.'

LEAVEN

'The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.'—MATT. xiii. 33.

How lovingly and meditatively Jesus looked upon homely life, knowing nothing of the differences, the vulgar differences, between the small and great! A poor woman, with her morsel of barm, kneading it up among three measures of meal, in some coarse earthenware pan, stands to Him as representing the whole process of His work in the world. Matthew brings together in this chapter a series of seven parables of the kingdom, possibly spoken at different times, and gathered here into a sequence and series, just as he has done with the great procession of miracles that follows the Sermon on the Mount, and just as, perhaps, he has done with that sermon itself. The two first of the seven deal with the progress of the Gospel in individual minds and the hindrances thereto. Then there follows a pair, of which my text is the second, which deal with the geographical expansion of the kingdom throughout the world, in the parable of the grain of mustard-seed growing into the great herb, and with the inward, penetrating, diffusive influence of the kingdom, working as an assimilating and transforming force in the midst of society.

I do not purpose to enter now upon the wide and difficult question of the relation of the kingdom to the Church. Suffice it to say that the two terms are by no means synonymous, but that, at the same time, inasmuch as a kingdom implies a community of subjects, the churches, in the proportion in which they have assimilated the leaven, and are holding fast

by the powers which Christ has lodged within them, are approximate embodiments of the kingdom. The parable, then, suggests to us, in a very striking and impressive form, the function and the obligations of Christian people in the world.

Let me deal, in a purely expository fashion, with the emblem before us.

‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven.’ Now of course, leaven is generally in Scripture taken as a symbol of evil or corruption. For example, the preliminary to the Passover Feast was the purging of the houses of the Israelites of every scrap of evil ferment, and the bread which was eaten on that Feast was prescribed to be unleavened. But fermentation works ennobling as well as corruption, and our Lord lays hold upon the other possible use of the metaphor. The parable teaches that the effect of the Gospel, as ministered by, and residing in, the society of men, in whom the will of God is supreme, is to change the heavy lump of dough into light, nutritious bread. There are three or four points suggested by the parable which I could touch upon; and the first of them is that significant disproportion between the apparent magnitude of the dead mass that is to be leavened, and the tiny piece of active energy which is to diffuse itself throughout it.

We get there a glimpse into our Lord’s attitude, measuring Himself against the world and the forces that were in it. He knows that in Him, the sole Representative, at the moment, of the kingdom of heaven upon earth—because in Him, and in Him alone, the divine will was, absolutely and always, supreme—there lie, for the time confined to Him, but never dormant, powers which are adequate to the

transformation of humanity from a dead, lumpish mass into an aggregate all-penetrated by a quickening influence, and, if I might so say, fermented with a new life that He will bring. A tremendous conception, and the strange thing about it is that it looks as if the Nazarene peasant's dream was going to come true! But He was speaking to the men whom He was charging with a delegated task, and to them He says, 'There are but twelve of you, and you are poor, ignorant men, and you have no resources at your back, but you have Me, and that is enough, and you may be sure that the tiny morsel of yeast will penetrate the whole mass.' Small beginnings characterise the causes which are destined to great endings; the things that are ushered into the world large, generally grow very little further, and speedily collapse. 'An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end shall not be blessed.' The force which is destined to be world-wide, began with the one Man in Nazareth, and although the measures of meal are three, and the ferment is a scrap, it is sure to permeate and transform the mass.

Therefore, brethren, let us take the encouragement that our Lord here offers. If we are adherents of unpopular causes, if we have to 'stand alone with two or three,' do not let us count heads, but measure forces. 'What everybody says must be true,' is a cowardly proverb. It may be a correct statement that an absolutely universal opinion is a true opinion, but what most people say is usually false, and what the few say is most generally true. So if we have to front—and if we are true men we shall sometimes have to front—an embattled mass of antagonism, and we be in a miserable minority, never mind! We

can say, 'They that be with us are more than they that be with them.' If we have anything of the leaven in us, we are mightier than the lump of dough.

But there is another point here, and that is the contact that is necessary between the leaven and the dough. We have passed from the old monastic idea of Religion being seclusion from life. But that mistake dies hard, and there are many very Evangelical and very Protestant—and in their own notions superlatively good—people, who hold a modern analogue of the old monastic idea; and who think that Christian men and women should be very tepidly interested in anything except what they call the preaching of the Gospel, and the saving of men's souls. Now nobody that knows me, and the trend of my preaching, will charge me with undervaluing either of these things, but these do not exhaust the function of the Church in the world, nor the duty of the Church to society. We have to learn from the metaphor in the parable. The dough is not kept on one shelf and the leaven on another; the bit of leaven is plunged into the heart of the mass, and then the woman kneads the whole up in her pan, and so the influence is spread. We Christians are not doing our duty, nor are we using our capacities, unless we fling ourselves frankly and energetically into all the currents of the national life, commercial, political, municipal, intellectual, and make our influence felt in them all. The 'salt of the earth' is to be rubbed into the meat in order to keep it from putrefaction; the leaven is to be kneaded up into the dough in order to raise it. Christian people are to remember that they are here, not for the purpose of isolating themselves, but in order that they may touch life at all points, and at all points bring

into contact with earthly life the better life and the principles of Christian morality.

But in this contact with all phases of life and forms of activity, Christian men are to be sure that they take the leaven with them. There are professing Christians that say: 'Oh! I am not strait-laced and pharisaical. I do not keep myself apart from any movements of humanity. I count nothing that belongs to men alien to a Christian.' All right! but when you go into these movements, when you go into Parliament, when you become a city Councillor, when you mingle with other men in commerce, when you meet other students in the walks of intellect, do you take your Christianity there, or do you leave it behind? The two things are equally necessary, that Christians should be in all these various spheres of activity, and that they should be there, distinctly, manifestly, and, when need be, avowedly, as Christian men.

Further, there is another thought here, on which I just say one word, and that is the effect of the leaven on the dough.

It is to assimilate, to set up a ferment. And that is what Christianity did when it came into the world, and

'Cast the kingdoms old
Into another mould.'

And that is what it ought to do to-day, and will do, if Christian men are true to themselves and to their Lord. Do you not think that there would be a ferment if Christian principles were applied, say, for instance, to national politics? Do you not think there would be a ferment if Christian principles were brought to bear upon all the transactions on the Exchange? Is there any region of life into which the introduction of

the plain precepts of Christianity as the supreme law would not revolutionise it? We talk about England as a Christian country. Is it? A Christian country is a country of Christians, and Christians are not people that only say 'I have faith in Jesus Christ,' but people that do His will. That is the leaven that is to change, and yet not to change, the whole mass; to change it by lightening it, by putting a new spirit into it, leaving the substance apparently unaffected except in so far as the substance has been corrupted by the evilspirit that rules. Brethren, if we as Christians were doing our duty, it would be true of us as it was of the early preachers of the Cross, that we are men who turn the world upside down.

But there is one more point on which I touch. I have already anticipated some of what I would say upon it, but I must dwell upon it for a little longer; and that is, the manner in which the leaven is to work.

Here is a morsel of barm in the middle of a lump of dough. It works by contact, touches the particles nearest it, and transforms them into vehicles for the further transmission of influence. Each particle touched by the ferment becomes itself a ferment, and so the process goes on, outwards and ever outwards, till it permeates the whole mass. That is to say, the individual is to become the transmitter of the influence to him who is next him. The individuality of the influence, and the track in which it is to work, viz. upon those in immediate contiguity to the transformed particle which is turned from dough into leaven, are taught us here in this wonderful simile.

Now that carries a very serious and solemn lesson for us all. If you have received, you are able, and you are bound, to transmit this quickening, assimilating,

transforming, lightening influence, and you need never complain of a want of objects upon which to exercise it, for the man or woman that is next you is the person that you ought to affect.

Now I have already said, in an earlier portion of these remarks, that some good people, taking an erroneous view of the function and obligations of the Church in the world, would fain keep its work to purely evangelistic effort upon individual souls in presenting to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Saviour. But whilst I vehemently protest against the notion that that is the whole function of the Christian Church, I would as vehemently protest against the notion that the so-called social work of the Church can ever be efficiently done except upon the foundation laid of this evangelistic work. First and foremost amongst the ways in which this great obligation of leavening humanity is to be discharged, must ever stand, as I believe, the appeal to the individual conscience and heart, and the presentation to single souls of the great Name in which are stored all the regenerative and quickening impulses that can ever alleviate and bless humanity. So that, first and foremost, I put the preaching of the Gospel, the Gospel of our salvation, by the death and in the life of the Incarnate Son of God.

But then, besides that, let me remind you there are other ways, subsidiary but indispensable ways, in which the Church has to discharge its function; and I put foremost amongst these, what I have already touched upon, and therefore need not dilate on now, the duty of Christians as Christians to take their full share in all the various forms of national life. I need not dwell upon the evils rampant amongst us, which

have to be dealt with, and, as I believe, may best if not only, be dealt with, upon Christian principles. Think of drink, lust, gambling, to name but three of them, the hydra-headed serpent that is poisoning the English nation. Now it seems to me to be a deplorable, but a certainly true thing, that not only are these evils not attacked by the Churches as they ought to be, but that to a very large extent the task of attacking them has fallen into the hands of people who have little sympathy with the Church and its doctrines. They are fighting the evils on principles drawn from Jesus Christ, but they are not fighting the evils to the extent that they ought to do, with the Churches alongside. I beseech you, in your various spheres, to see to it that, as far as you can make it so, Christian people take the place that Christ meant them to take in the conflict with the miseries, the sorrows, the sins that honeycomb England to-day, and not to let it be said that the Churches shut themselves up and preach to people, but do not lift a finger to deal with the social evils of the nation.

TREASURE AND PEARL

‘The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. 45. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man, seeking goodly pearls: 46. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.’—MATT. xiii. 44-46.

IN this couple of parables, which are twins, and must be taken together, our Lord utilises two very familiar facts of old-world life, both of them arising from a similar cause. In the days when there were no banks and no limited liability companies, it was difficult for a man to know what to do with his little savings. In

old times government meant oppression, and it was dangerous to seem to have any riches. In old days war stalked over the land, and men's property must be portable or else concealed. So, on the one hand we find the practice of hiding away little hoards in some suitable place, beneath a rock, in the cleft of a tree, or a hole dug in the ground, and then, perhaps, the man died before he came back for his wealth. Or, again, another man might prefer to carry his wealth about with him. So he went and got jewels, easily carried, not easily noticed, easily convertible into what he might require.

And, says our Lord, these two practices, with which all the people to whom He was speaking were very much more familiar than we are, teach us something about the kingdom of God. Now, I am not going to be tempted to discuss what our Lord means by that phrase, so frequent upon His lips, 'the kingdom of God' or 'of heaven.' Suffice it to say that it means, in the most general terms, a state or order of things in which God is King, and His will supreme and sovereign. Christ came, as He tells us, to found and to extend that kingdom upon earth. A man can go into it, and it can come into a man, and the conditions on which he enters into it, and it into him, are laid down in this pair of parables. So I ask you to notice their similarities and their divergences. They begin alike and they run on alike for a little way, and then they diverge. There is a fork in the road, and they reunite at the end again. They agree in their representation of the treasure; they diverge in their explanation of the process of discovering it, and they unite at last in the final issue. So, then, we have to look at these three points.

I. Let me ask you to think that the true treasure for a man lies in the kingdom of God.

It is not exactly said that the treasure is the kingdom, but the treasure is found in the kingdom, and nowhere else. Let us put away the metaphor; it means that the only thing that will make us rich is loving submission to the supreme law of the God whom we love because we know that He loves us. You may put that thought into half a dozen different forms. You may say that the treasure is the blessing that comes from Christianity, or the inward wealth of a submissive heart, or may use various modes of expression, but below them all lies this one great thought, that it is laid on my heart, dear brethren, to try and lay on yours now, that, when all is said and done, the only possession that makes us rich is—is what? God Himself. For that is the deepest meaning of the treasure. And whatever other forms of expression we may use to designate it, they all come back at last to this, that the wealth of the human soul is to have God for its very own.

Let me run over two or three points that show us that. That treasure is the only one that meets our deepest poverty. We do not all know what that is, but whether you know it or not, dear friend, the thing that you want most is to have your sins dealt with, in the double way of having them forgiven as guilt, and in having them taken away from you as tyrants and dominators over your wills. And it is only God who can do that, 'God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,' and giving them, by a new life which He breathes into dead souls, emancipation from the tyrants that rule over them, and thus bringing them 'into the liberty of

the glory of the sons of God.' 'Thou sayest that Thou art rich and increased with goods . . . and knowest not that thou art poor . . . and naked.' Brother, until you have found out that it is only God who will save you from being bankrupt, and enable you to pay your debts, which are your duties, you do not know where your true riches are. And if you have all that men can acquire of the lower things of life, whether of what is generally called wealth or of other material benefits, and have that great indebtedness standing against you, you are but an insolvent after all. Here is the treasure that will make you rich, because it will pay your debts, and endow you with capacity enough to meet all future expenditure—viz. the possession of the forgiving and cleansing grace of God which is in Jesus Christ. If you have that, you are rich; if you do not possess it, you are poor. Now you believe that, as much as I do, most of you. Well, what do you do in consequence?

Further, the possession of God, who belongs to all those that are the subjects of the kingdom of God, is our true treasure, because that wealth, and that alone, meets at once all the diverse wants of the human soul. There is nothing else of which that can be said. There are a great many other precious things in this world—human loves, earthly ambitions of noble and legitimate kinds. No one but a fool will deny the convenience and the good of having a competency of this world's possessions. But all these have this miserable defect, or rather limitation, that they each satisfy some little corner of a man's nature, and leave all the rest, if I may so say, like the beasts in a menagerie whose turn has not yet come to be fed, yelping and growling while the keeper is at the den of another one.

There is only one thing that, being applied, as it were, at the very centre, will diffuse itself, like some fragrant perfume, through the whole sphere, and fill the else scentless air with its rich and refreshing fragrance. There is but one wealth which meets the whole of human nature. You, however small you are, however insignificant people may think you, however humbly you may think of yourselves, you are so great that the whole created Universe, if it were yours, would be all too little for you. You cannot fill a bottomless bog with any number of cartloads of earth. And you know as well as I can tell you that 'he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase,' and that none of the good things here below, rich and precious as many of them are, are large enough to fill, much less to expand, the limitless desires of one human heart. As the ancient Latin father said, 'Lord, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is unquiet till it attains to Thee.'

Closely connected with that thought, but capable of being dealt with for a moment apart, is the other, that this is our true treasure, because we have it all in one.

You remember the beautiful emphasis of one of the parables in our text about the man that dissipated himself in seeking for many goodly pearls? He had secured a whole casket full of little ones. They were pearls, they were many; but then he saw one Orient pearl, and he said, 'The one is more than the many. Let me have unity, for there is rest; whereas in multiplicity there is restlessness and change.' The sky to-night may be filled with galaxies of stars. Better one sun than a million twinkling tininesses that fill the heavens, and yet do not scatter the darkness. Oh, brethren, to have one aim, one love, one treasure,

one Christ, one God—there is the secret of blessedness. ‘Unite my heart to fear Thy name’; and then all the miseries of multiplicity, and of drawing our supplies from a multitude of separate lakes, will be at an end, when our souls are flooded from the one fountain of life that can never fail or be turbid. Thus, the unity of the treasure is the supreme excellence of the treasure.

Nor need I remind you in more than a word of how this is our true treasure, because it is our permanent one. Nothing that can be taken from me is truly mine. Those of you who have lived in a great commercial community as long as I have done, know that it is not for nothing that sovereigns are made circular, for they roll very rapidly, and ‘riches take to themselves wings and fly away.’ We can all go back to instances of men who set their hearts upon wealth, and flaunted their little hour before us as kings of the Exchange, and were objects of adoration and of envy, and at last were left stranded in poverty. Nothing that can be stripped from you by the accidents of life, or by inevitable death, is worth calling your ‘good.’ You must have something that is intertwined with the very fibres of your being. And I, unworthy as I am, come to you, dear friends, now, with this proffer of the great gift of wealth from which ‘neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us.’ And I beseech you to ask yourselves, Is there anything worth calling wealth, except that wealth which meets my deepest need, which satisfies my whole nature, which I may have all in one, and which, if I have, I may have for ever? That wealth is the God who may be

‘the strength of your hearts and your heritage for ever.’

II. Now notice, secondly, the concealment of the treasure.

According to the first of our parables, the treasure was hid in a field. That is very largely local colouring, which gives veracity and vraisemblance to the fact of the story. And there has been a great deal of very unnecessary and misplaced ingenuity spent in trying to force interpretations upon every feature of the parable, which I do not intend to imitate, but I just wish to suggest one thing. Here was this man in the story, who had plodded across that field a thousand times, and knew every clod of it, and had never seen the wealth that was lying six inches below the surface. Now, that is very like some of my present hearers. God’s treasure comes to the world in a form which to a great many people veils, if it does not altogether hide, its preciousness. You have heard sermons till you are sick of sermons, and I do not wonder at it, if you have heard them and never thought of acting on them. You know all that I can tell you, most of you, about Jesus Christ, and what He has done for you, and what you should do towards Him, and your familiarity with the Word has blinded you to its spirit and its power. You have gone over the field so often that you have made a path across it, and it seems incredible to you that there should be anything worth your picking up there. Ah! dear friends, Jesus Christ, when He was here, ‘in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,’ had to the men that looked upon Him ‘neither form nor comeliness that they should desire Him,’ and He was to them a stumbling-block and foolishness. And Christ’s Gospel

comes among busy men, worldly men, men who are under the dominion of their passions and desires, men who are pursuing science and knowledge, and it looks to them very homely, very insignificant; they do not know what treasure is lying in it. You do not know what treasure is lying—may I venture to say it?—in these poor words of mine, in so far as they truly represent the mind and will of God. Dear brethren, the treasure is hid, but that is not because God did not wish you to see it; it is because you have made yourselves blind to its flashing brightness. ‘If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them . . . in whom the god of this world hath blinded their eyes.’ If your whole desires are passionately set on that which Manchester recognises as the *summum bonum*, or, if you are living without a thought beyond this present, how can you expect to see the treasure, though it is lying there before your eyes? You have buried it, or, rather, you have made that which is its necessary envelope to be its obscuration. I pray you, look through the forms, look beneath the words of Scripture, and try and clear your eyesight from the hallucinations of the dazzling present, and you will see the treasure that is hid in the field.

III. Again, let me ask you to notice, further, the two ways of finding.

The rustic in the first story, who, as I said, had plodded across the field a hundred times, was doing it for the hundred and first, or perhaps was at work there with his mattock or his homely plough. And, perchance, some stroke of the spade, or push of the coulter, went a little deeper than usual, and there flashed the gold, or some shower of rain came on, and washed away a little of the superincumbent soil,

and laid bare the bag. Now, that is what often happens, for you have to remember that though you are not seeking God, God is always seeking you, and so the great saying comes to be true, 'I am found of them that sought Me not.' There have been many cases like the one of the man who, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, with no thought in his mind except to bind the disciples and bring them captive to Jerusalem, saw suddenly a light from heaven flashing down upon him, and a Voice that pulled him up in the midst of his career. Ah! it would be an awful thing if no one found Christ except those who set out to seek for Him. Like the dew on the grass 'that waiteth not for men, nor tarrieth for the sons of men,' He often comes to hearts that are thinking about nothing less than about Him.

There are men and women listening to me now who did not come here with any expectation of being confronted with this message to their souls; they may have been drawn by curiosity or by a hundred other motives. If there is one such, to whom I am speaking, who has had no desires after the treasure, who has never thought that God was his only Good, who has been swallowed up in worldly things and the common affairs of life, and who now feels as if a sudden flash had laid bare the hidden wealth in the familiar Gospel, I beseech such a one not to turn away from the discovered treasure, but to make it his own. Dear friend, you may not be looking for the wealth, but Christ is looking for His lost coin. And, though it has rolled away into some dusty corner, and is lying there all unaware, I venture to say that He is seeking you by my poor words to-night, and is saying to you: 'I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire.'

But then another class is described in the other parable of the merchantman who was seeking many goodly pearls. I suppose he may stand as a representative of a class of whom I have no doubt there are some other representatives hearing me now, namely, persons who, without yielding themselves to the claims of Christ, have been searching, honestly and earnestly, for 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.' Dear brethren, if you have been smitten by the desire to live noble lives, if you have been roused

' To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the furthest bounds of human thought,'

or if in any way you are going through the world with your eyes looking for something else than the world's gross good, and are seeking for the many pearls, I beseech you to lay this truth to heart, that you will never find what you seek, until you understand that the many have not it to give you, and that the One has. And when Christ draws near to you and says, 'Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, if thou seekest them, take Me, and thou wilt find them all,' I beseech you, accept Him. There are two ways of finding the treasure. It is flashed on unexpectant eyes, and it is disclosed to seeking souls.

III. And now, lastly, let us look at the point where the parables converge.

There are two ways of finding; there is only one way of getting. The one man went and sold all that he had and bought the field. Never mind about the morality of the transaction: that has nothing to do with our Lord's purpose. Perhaps it was not quite honest of

this man to bury the treasure again, and then to go and buy the field for less than it was worth, but the point is that, however a soul is brought to see that God in Christ is all that he needs, there is only one way of getting Him, and that is, 'sell all that thou hast.'

'Then it is barter, is it? Then it is salvation by works after all?' No! To 'sell all that thou hast' is first, to abandon all hope of acquiring the treasure by anything that thou hast. We buy it when we acknowledge that we have nothing of our own to buy it with. Buy it 'without money and without price'; buy it by yielding your hearts; buy it by ceasing to cling to earth and creatures, as if they were your good. That trust in Jesus Christ, which is the condition of salvation, is selling 'all that thou hast.' Self is 'all that thou hast.' Abandon self and clutch Him, and the treasure is thine. But the initial act of faith has to be carried on through a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice, and the subjugation of self-will, which is the hardest of all, and the submission of one's self altogether to the kingdom of God and to its King. If we do thus we shall have the treasure, and if we do not thus we shall not.

Surely it is reasonable to fling away paste pearls for real ones. Surely it is reasonable to fling away brass counters for gold coins. Surely, in all regions of life, we willingly sacrifice the second best in order to get the very best. Surely, if the wealth which is in God is more precious than all besides, you have the best of the bargain, if you part with the world and yourselves and get Him. And if, on the other hand, you stick to the second best and cleave to yourselves and to this poor diurnal sphere and what it contains, then I will tell you what your epitaph will be. It is written in

one of the Psalms. 'He shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his latter end shall be a fool.'

And there is a more foolish fool still—the man who, when he has seen the treasure, flings another shovelful of earth upon it, and goes away and does *not* buy it, nor think anything more about it. Dear brother, do not do that, but if, by God's help, any poor words of mine have stirred anything in your hearts of recognition of what your true wealth is, do not rest until you have done what is needful to possess it, given away yourselves, and in exchange received Christ, and in Him wealth for evermore.

THE MARTYRDOM OF JOHN

'At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, 2. And said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. 3. For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. 4. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her. 5. And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. 6. But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. 7. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. 8. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. 9. And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. 10. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. 11. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother. 12. And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.'—MATT. xiv. 1-12.

THE singular indifference of the Bible to the fate of even its greatest men is exemplified in the fact that the martyrdom of John is only told incidentally, in explanation of Herod's alarm. But for that he would apparently have dropped out of the narrative, as a man sinks in the sea, without a bubble or a ripple. Christ is the sole theme of the Gospels, and all others are visible only as His light falls on them.

It took a long time for news of Christ to reach the ears of Herod. Peasants hear of Him before princes, whose thick palace walls and crowds of courtiers shut out truth. The first thing to note is the alarm of the conscience-stricken king. We learn from the other evangelists that there was a difference of opinion among the attendants of Herod—not very good judges of a religious teacher—as to who this new miracle-working Rabbi might be, but the tetrarch has no hesitation. There is no proof that Herod was a Sadducee; but he probably thought as little about a resurrection as if he had been, and, in any case, did not expect dead men to be starting up again, one by one, and mingling with the living. His conscience made a coward of him, and his fear made that terrible which would else have been thought impossible. In his terror he makes confidants of his slaves, overleaping the barriers of position, in his need of some ears to pour his fears into. He was right in believing that he had not finished with John, and in expecting to meet him again with mightier power to accuse and condemn. ‘If ’twere done when ’tis done,’ says Macbeth; but it is not done. There is a resurrection of deeds as well as of bodies, and all our buried badnesses will front us again, shaking their gory locks at us, and saying that we did them.

Instead of following closely the narrative, we may best gather up its lessons by considering the actors in the tragedy.

I. We see in Herod the depths of evil possible to a weak character. The singular double which he, Herodias and John present to Ahab, Jezebel and Elijah, has been often noticed. In both cases a weak king is drawn in opposite directions by the stronger-willed

temptress at his side, and by the stern ascetic from the desert. How John had found his way into 'kings' houses' we do not know; but, as he carried thither his undaunted boldness of plain-spoken preaching of morality and repentance, it was inevitable that he should soon find his way from the palace to the dungeon. There must have been some intercourse between Herod and him before his imprisonment, or he could not have shaken the king's conscience with his blunt denunciations. From the account in Mark, it would appear that, after his imprisonment, he gained great influence over the tetrarch, and led him some steps on the way of goodness. But Herod was 'infirm of purpose,' and a beautiful fiend was at his side, and she had an iron will sharpened to an edge by hatred, and knew her own mind, which was murder. Between them, the weaker nature was much perplexed, and like a badly steered boat, yawed in its course, now yielding to the impulse from John, now to that from Herodias. Matthew attributes his hesitation as to killing John to his fear of the popular voice, which, no doubt, also operated. Thus he 'let I dare not wait upon I would,' and had not strength of mind enough to hold to the one and despise the other of his discordant counsellors. He was evidently a sensual, luxurious, feeble-willed, easily frightened, superstitious and cunning despot; and, as is always the case with such, he was driven farther in evil than he meant or wished. He was entrapped into an oath, and then, instead of saying, 'Promises which should not have been made should not be kept,' he weakly consents, from fantastic fear of what his guests will say of him, and unwillingly, out of pure imbecility, stains his soul for ever with blood. In this wicked world, weak men will always be wicked

men; for it is less trouble to consent than to resist, and there are more sirens to whisper 'Come' than prophets to thunder, 'It is not lawful.' Strength of will is needful for all noble life.

We may learn from Herod, also, how far we may go on the road of obedience to God's will, and yet leave it at last. What became of all his eager listening, of his partial obedience, of his care to keep John safe from Herodias's malice? All vanished like early dew. What became of his conscience-stricken alarms on hearing of Christ? Did they lead to any deep convictions? They faded away, and left him harder than before. Convictions not followed out ossify the heart. If he had sent for Christ, and told Him his fears, all might have been well. But he let them pass, and, so far as we know, they never returned. He did meet Jesus at last, when Pilate sent him the Prisoner, as a piece of politeness, and in what mood?—childish pleasure at the chance of seeing a miracle. How did Jesus answer his torrent of frivolous questions? 'He answered him nothing.' That sad silence speaks Christ's knowledge that now even His words would be vain to create one ripple of interest on the Dead Sea of Herod's soul. By frivolity, lust, and neglect he had killed the germ of a better life, and silence was the kindest answer which perfect love could give him.

He shows us, too, the intimate connection of all sins. The common root of every sin is selfishness, and the shapes which it takes are protean and interchangeable. Lust dwells hard by hate. Sensual crimes and cruelty are closely akin. The one vice which Herod would not surrender, dragged after it a whole tangle of other sins. No sin dwells alone. There is 'none barren among them.' They are gregarious, and a solitary sin

is more seldom seen than a single swallow. Herod is an illustration, too, of a conscience fantastically sensitive, while it is dead to real crimes. He has no twinges for his sin with Herodias, and no effective ones at killing John, but he thinks it would be wrong to break his oath. The two things often go together; and many a brigand in Calabria, who would cut a throat without hesitation, would not miss mass, or rob without a little image of the Virgin in his hat. We often make compensation for easy indulgence in great sins by fussy scrupulosity about little faults, and, like Herod, had rather commit murder than not be polite to visitors.

II. The next actors in the tragedy are Herodias and her daughter. What a miserable destiny to be gibbeted for ever by half a dozen sentences! One deed, after which she no doubt 'wiped her mouth, and said, I have done no harm,' has won for the mother an immortality of ignominy. Her portrait is drawn in few strokes, but they are enough. In strength of will and unscrupulous carelessness of human life, she is the sister of Jezebel, and curiously like Shakespeare's awful creation, Lady Macbeth; but she adds a stain of sensuous passion to their vices, which heightens the horror. Her first marriage was with her full uncle; and her second, if marriage it can be called when her husband and Herod's wife were both living, was with her step-uncle, and thus triply unlawful. John's remonstrance awoke no sense of shame in her, but only malignant and murderous hate. Once resolved, no failures made her swerve from her purpose. Hers was no passing fury, but cold-blooded, deliberate determination. Her iron will and unalterable persistence were accompanied by flexibility of resource.

When one weapon failed, she drew another from a full quiver. And the means which were finally successful show not only her thorough knowledge of the weak man she had to deal with, but her readiness to stoop to any degradation for herself and her child to carry her point. 'A thousand claims to' abhorrence 'meet in her, as mother, wife, and queen.' Many a shameless woman would have shrunk from sullyng a daughter's childhood, by sending her to play the part of a shameless dancing-girl before a crew of half-tipsy revellers, and from teaching her young lips to ask for murder. But Herodias sticks at nothing, and is as insensible to the duty of a mother as to that of a wife. If we put together these features in her character, her hot animal passions, her cool inflexible revenge, her cynical disregard of all decency, her deadness to natural affection for her child, her ferocity and her cunning, we have a hideous picture of corrupted womanhood. We cannot but wonder whether, in after days, remorse ever did its merciful work upon Herodias. She urged Herod to his ruin at last by her ambition, which sought for him the title of king, and, with one redeeming touch of faithfulness, went with him into dreary exile in Gaul. Perhaps there, among strangers, and surrounded by the wreck of her projects, and when the hot fire of passion had died down, she may have remembered and repented her crime.

The criminality of the daughter largely depends upon her age, of which we have no knowledge. Perhaps she was too mere a child to understand the degradation of the dance, or the infamy of the request which her, we hope, innocent and panting lips were tutored to prefer. But, more probably, she was old enough to be her mother's fellow-conspirator, rather

than her tool, and had learned only too well her lessons of impurity and cruelty. What chance had a young life in such a sty of filth? When the mother becomes the devil's deputy, what can the daughter grow up to be, but a worse edition of her? This poor girl, so sinning, and so sinned against, followed in Herodias's footsteps, and afterwards married, according to the custom of the Herods, her uncle, Philip the tetrarch. She inherited and was taught evil; that was her misfortune. She made it her own; that was her crime. As she stands there, shameless and flushed, in that hideous banqueting-hall, with her grim gift dripping red blood on the golden platter, and wicked triumph gleaming in her dark eyes, she suggests grave questions as to parents' responsibility for children's sins, and is a living symbol of the degradation of art to the service of vice, and of the power of an evil soul to make hideous all the grace of budding womanhood.

III. There is something dramatically appropriate in the silent death in the dungeon of the lonely forerunner. The faint noise of revelry may have reached his ears, as he brooded there, and wondered if the coming King would never come for his enlargement. Suddenly a gleam of light from the opened door enters his cell, and falls on the blade of the headsman's sword. Little time can be wasted, for Herodias waits. With short preface the blow falls. The King has come, and set His forerunner free, sending him to prepare His way before Him in the dim regions beyond. A world where Herod sits in the festal chamber, and John lies headless in the dungeon, needs some one to set it right. When the need is sorest, the help is nearest. Truth succeeds by the apparent failure of its apostle. Herodias may stab the dead tongue, as the

legend tells that she did, but it speaks louder after death than ever. Herod kept his birthday with drunken and bloody mirth; but it was a better birthday for his victim.

IV. It needed some courage for John's disciples to come to that gloomy, blood-stained fortress, and bear away the headless trunk which scornful cruelty had flung out to rot unburied. When reverent love and sorrow had finished their task, what was the little flock without a shepherd to do? The possibility of their continued existence as a company of disciples was at an end. They show by their action that their master had profited from his last message to Jesus. At once they turn to Him, and, no doubt, the bulk of them were absorbed in the body of His followers. Sorrowful and bereaved souls betake themselves naturally to His sweet sympathy for soothing, and to His gentle wisdom for direction. The wisest thing that any of us can do is to 'go and tell Jesus' our loneliness, and let it bind us more closely to Him.

THE GRAVE OF THE DEAD JOHN AND THE GRAVE OF THE LIVING JESUS

'And John's disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.'—*MATT.* xiv. 12.

'And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy.'—*MATT.* xxviii. 8.

THERE is a remarkable parallel and still more remarkable contrast between these two groups of disciples at the graves of their respective masters. John the Baptist's followers venture into the very jaws of the lion to rescue the headless corpse of their martyred

teacher from a prison grave. They bear it away and lay it reverently in its unknown sepulchre, and when they have done these last offices of love they feel that all is over. They have no longer a centre, and they disintegrate. There was nothing to hold them together any more. The shepherd had been smitten, and the flock were scattered. As a 'school' or a distinct community they cease to be, and are mostly absorbed into the ranks of Christ's followers. That sorrowful little company that turned from John's grave, perhaps amidst the grim rocks of Moab, perhaps in his native city amongst the hills of Judah, parted then, to meet no more, and to bear away only a common sorrow that time would comfort, and a common memory that time would dim.

The other group laid their martyred Master in His grave with as tender hands and as little hope as did John's disciples. The bond that held them together was gone too, and the disintegrating process began at once. We see them breaking up into little knots, and soon they, too, will be scattered. The women come to the grave to perform the woman's office of anointing, and they are left to go alone. Other slight hints are given which show how much the ties of companionship had been relaxed, even in a day, and how certainly and quickly they would have fallen asunder. But all at once a new element comes in, all is changed. The earliest visitors to the sepulchre leave it, not with the lingering sorrow of those who have no more that they can do, but with the quick, buoyant step of people charged with great and glad tidings. They come to it wrapped in grief—they leave it with great joy. They come to it, feeling that all was over, and that their union with the rest who had loved Him was little more

than a remembrance. They go away, feeling that they are all bound together more closely than ever.

The grave of John was the end of a 'school.' The grave of Jesus was the beginning of a Church. Why? The only answer is the message which the women brought back from the empty sepulchre on that Easter day: 'The Lord is risen.' The whole history of the Christian Church, and even its very existence, is unintelligible, except on the supposition of the resurrection. But for that, the fate of John's disciples would have been the fate of Christ's—they would have melted away into the mass of the nation, and at most there would have been one more petty Galilean sect that would have lived on for a generation and died out when the last of His companions died. So from these two contrasted groups we may fairly gather some thoughts as to the Resurrection of Christ, as attested by the very existence of a Christian Church, and as to the joy of that resurrection.

I. Now the first point to be considered is, that the conduct of Christ's disciples after His death was exactly the opposite of what might have been expected.

They held together. The natural thing for them to do would have been to disband; for their one bond was gone; and if they had acted according to the ordinary laws of human conduct, they would have said to themselves, Let us go back to our fishing-boats and our tax-gathering, and seek safety in separation, and nurse our sorrow apart. A few lingering days might have been given to weep together at His grave, and to assuage the first bitterness of grief and disappointment; but when these were over, nothing could have prevented Christianity and the Church from being buried in the same sepulchre as Jesus. As certainly as

the stopping up of the fountain would empty the river's bed, so surely would Christ's death have scattered His disciples. And that strange fact, that it did not scatter them, needs to be looked well into and fairly accounted for in some plausible manner. The end of John's school gives a parallel which brings the singularity of the fact into stronger relief; and looking at these two groups as they stand before us in these two texts, the question is irresistibly suggested, Why did not the one fall away into its separate elements, as the other did? The keystone of the arch was in both cases withdrawn—why did the one structure topple into ruin while the other stood firm?

Not only did the disciples of Christ keep united, but their conceptions of Jesus underwent a remarkable change, after His death. We might have expected, indeed, that, when memory began to work, and the disturbing influence of daily association was withdrawn, the same idealising process would have begun on their image of Him, which reveals and ennobles the characters of our dear ones who have gone away from us. Most men have to die before their true worth is discerned. But no process of that sort will suffice to account for the change and heightening of the disciples' thoughts about their dead Lord. It was not merely that, when they remembered, they said, Did not our hearts burn within us by the way while He talked with us?—but that His death wrought exactly the opposite effect from what it might have been expected to do. It ought to have ended their hope that He was the Messiah, and we know that within forty-eight hours it was beginning to do so, as we learn from the plaintive words of disappointed and fading hope: 'We *trusted* that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.' If, so

early, the cold conviction was stealing over their hearts that their dearest expectation was proved by His death to have been a dream, what could have prevented its entire dominion over them, as the days grew into months and years? But somehow or other that process was arrested, and the opposite one set in. The death that should have shattered Messianic dreams confirmed them. The death that should have cast a deeper shadow of incomprehensibleness over His strange and lofty claims poured a new light upon them, which made them all plain and clear. The very parts of His teaching which His death would have made those who loved Him wish to forget, became the centre of His followers' faith. His cross became His throne. Whilst He lived with them they knew not what He said in His deepest words, but, by a strange paradox, His death convinced them that He was the Son of God, and that that which they had seen with their eyes, and their hands had handled, was the Eternal Life. The cross alone could never have done that. Something else there must have been, if the men were sane, to account for this paradox.

Nor is this all. Another equally unlikely sequel of the death of Jesus is the unmistakable moral transformation effected on the disciples. Timorous and tremulous before, something or other touched them into altogether new boldness and self-possession. Dependent on His presence before, and helpless when He was away from them for an hour, they become all at once strong and calm; they stand before the fury of a Jewish mob and the threatenings of the Sanhedrim, unmoved and victorious. And these brave confessors and saintly heroes are the men who, a few weeks before, had been petulant, self-willed, jealous,

cowardly. What had lifted them suddenly so far above themselves? Their Master's death? That would more naturally have taken any heart or courage out of them, and left them indeed as sheep in the midst of wolves. Why, then, do they thus strangely blaze up into grandeur and heroism? Can any reasonable account be given of these paradoxes? Surely it is not too much to ask of people who profess to explain Christianity on naturalistic principles, that they shall make the process clear to us by which, Christ being dead and buried, His disciples were kept together, learned to think more loftily of Him, and sprang at once to a new grandeur of character. Why did not they do as John's disciples did, and disappear? Why was not the stream lost in the sand, when the headwaters were cut off?

II. Notice then, next, that the disciples' immediate belief in the Resurrection furnishes a reasonable, and the only reasonable, explanation of the facts.

There is no better historical evidence of a fact than the existence of an institution built upon it, and coeval with it. The Christian Church is such evidence for the fact of the Resurrection; or, to put the conclusion in the most moderate fashion, for the belief in the Resurrection. For, as we have shown, the natural effect of our Lord's death would have been to shatter the whole fabric: and if that effect were not produced, the only reasonable account of the force that hindered it is, that His followers believed that He rose again. Since that was their faith, one can understand how they were banded more closely together than ever. One can understand how their eyes were opened to know Him who was 'declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.' One can

understand how, in the enthusiasm of these new thoughts of their Lord, and in the strength of His victory over death, they put aside their old fears and littlenesses and clothed themselves in armour of light. 'The Lord is risen indeed' was the belief which made the continuous existence of the Church possible. Any other explanation of that great outstanding fact is lame and hopelessly insufficient.

We know that that belief was the belief of the early Church. Even if one waived all reference to the Gospels, we have the means of demonstrating that in Paul's undisputed epistles. Nobody has questioned that he wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians. The date most generally assumed to that letter brings it within about five-and-twenty years of the crucifixion. In that letter, in addition to a multitude of incidental references to the Lord as risen, we have the great passage in the fifteenth chapter, where the apostle not only declares that the Resurrection was one of the two facts which made his 'gospel,' but solemnly enumerates the witnesses of the risen Lord, and alleges that this gospel of the Resurrection was common to him and to all the Church. He tells us of Christ's appearance to himself at his conversion, which must have taken place within six or seven years of the crucifixion, and assures us that at that early period he found the whole Church believing and preaching Christ's resurrection. Their belief rested on their alleged intercourse with Him a few days after His death, and it is inconceivable that within so short a period such a belief should have sprung up and been universally received, if it had not begun when and as they said that it did.

But we are not left even to inferences of this kind to

show that, from the beginning, the Church witnessed to the Resurrection of Jesus. Its own existence is the great witness to its faith. And it is important to observe that, even if we had not the documentary evidence of the Pauline epistles as the earliest records, of the Gospels, and of the Acts of the Apostles, we should still have sufficient proof that the belief in the Resurrection is as old as the Church. For the continuance of the Church cannot be explained without it. If that faith had not dawned on their slow, sad hearts on that Easter morning, a few weeks would have seen them scattered; and if once they had been scattered, as they inevitably would have been, no power could have reunited them, any more than a diamond once shattered can be pieced together again. There would have been no motive and no actors to frame a story of resurrection, when once the little company had melted away. The existence of the Church depended on their belief that the Lord was risen. In the nature of the case that belief must have followed immediately on His death. It, and it only, reasonably accounts for the facts. And so, over and above Apostles, and Gospels, and Epistles, the Church is the great witness, by its very being, to its own immediate and continuous belief in the Resurrection of our Lord.

III. Again, we may remark that such a belief could not have originated or maintained itself unless it had been true.

Our previous remarks have gone no farther than to establish the belief in the Resurrection of Christ, as the basis of primitive Christianity. It is vehemently alleged, and we may freely admit that the step is a long one from subjective belief to objective reality.

But still it is surely perfectly fair to argue that a given belief is of such a nature that it cannot be supposed to rest on anything less solid than a fact; and this is eminently the case in regard to the belief in Christ's Resurrection. There have been many attempts on the part of those who reject that belief to account for its existence, and each of them in succession has 'had its day, and ceased to be.' Unbelief devours its own children remorselessly, and the succession to the throne of antichristian scepticism is won, as in some barbarous tribes, by slaying the reigning sovereign. The armies of the aliens turn their weapons against one another, and each new assailant of the historical veracity of the Gospels commences operations by showing that all previous assailants have been wrong, and that none of their explanations will hold water.

For instance, we hear nothing now of the coarse old explanation that the story of the Resurrection was a lie, and became current through the conscious imposture of the leaders of the Church. And it was high time that such a solution should be laid aside. Who, with half an eye for character, could study the deeds and the writings of the apostles, and not feel that, whatever else they were, they were profoundly honest, and as convinced as of their own existence, that they had seen Christ 'alive after His passion, by many infallible proofs'? If Paul and Peter and John were conspirators in a trick, then their lives and their words were the most astounding anomaly. Who, either, that had the faintest perception of the forces that sway opinion and frame systems, could believe that the fair fabric of Christian morality was built on the sand of a lie, and cemented by the slime of deceit bubbling up from the very pit of hell? Do men gather grapes of

thorns, or figs of thistles? That insolent hypothesis has had its day.

Then when it was discredited, we were told that the mythical tendency would explain everything. It showed us how good men could tell lies without knowing it, and how the religious value of an alleged fact in an alleged historical revelation did not in the least depend on its being a fact. And that great discovery, which first converted solid historical Christianity into a gaseous condition, and then caught the fumes in some kind of retort, and professed to hand us them back again improved by the sublimation, has pretty well gone the way of all hypotheses. Myths are not made in three days, or in three years, and no more time can be allowed for the formation of the myth of the Resurrection. What was the Church to feed on while the myth was growing? It would have been starved to death long before.

Then, the last new explanation which is gravely put forward, and is the prevailing one now, sustains itself by reference to undeniable facts in the history of religious movements, and of such abnormal attitudes of the mind as modern spiritualism. On the strength of which analogy we are invited to see in the faith of the early Christians in the Resurrection of the Lord a gigantic instance of 'hallucination.' No doubt there have been, and still are, extraordinary instances of its power, especially in minds excited by religious ideas. But we have only to consider the details of the facts in hand to feel that they cannot be accounted for on such a ground. Do hallucinations lay hold on five hundred people at once? Does a hallucination last for a long country walk, and give rise to protracted conversation? Does hallucination explain the story of

Christ eating and drinking before His disciples? The uncertain twilight of the garden might have begotten such an airy phantom in the brain of a single sobbing woman; but the appearances to be explained are so numerous, so varied in character, embrace so many details, appeal to so many of the senses—to the ear and hand as well as to the eye—were spread over so long a period, and were simultaneously shared by so large a number, that no theory of such a sort can account for them, unless by impugning the veracity of the records. And then we are back again on the old abandoned ground of deceit and imposture. It sounds plausible to say, Hallucination is a proved cause of many a supposed supernatural event—why not of this? But the plausibility of the solution ceases as soon as you try it on the actual facts in their variety and completeness. It has to be eked out with a length of the fox's skin of deceit before it covers them; and we may confidently assert that such a belief as the belief of the early Church in the Resurrection of the Lord was never the product either of deceit or of illusion, or of any amalgam of the two.

What new solutions the fertility of unbelief may yet bring forth, and the credulity of unbelief may yet accept, we know not; but we may firmly hold by the faith which breathed new hope and strange joy into that sad band on the first Easter morning, and rejoice with them in the glad, wonderful fact that He is risen from the dead.

IV. For that message is a message to us as truly as to the heavy-hearted unbelieving men that first received it. We may think for a moment of the joy with which *we* ought to return from the empty sepulchre of the risen Saviour.

How little these women knew that, as they went back from the grave in the morning twilight, they were the bearers of 'great joy which should be to all people'! To them and to the first hearers of their message there would be little clear in the rush of glad surprise, beyond the blessed thought, Then He is not gone from us altogether. Sweet visions of the resumption of happy companionship would fill their minds, and it would not be until calmer moments that the stupendous significance of the fact would reveal itself.

Mary's rapturous gesture to clasp Him by the feet, when the certainty that it was in very deed He flooded her soul with dazzling light, reveals her first emotion, which no doubt was also the first with them all, 'Then we shall have Him with us again, and all the old joy of companionship will be ours once more.' Nor were they wrong in thinking so, however little they as yet understood the future manner of their fellowship, or anticipated His leaving them again so soon. Nor are we without a share even in that phase of their joy; for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us a living Lord for our love, an ever present Companion and Brother for our hearts to hold, even if our hands cannot clasp Him by the feet. A dead Christ might have been the object of faint historical admiration, and the fair statue might have stood amidst others in the galleries of history; but the risen, living Christ can love and be loved, and we too may be glad with the joy of those who have found a heart to rest their hearts upon, and a companionship that can never fail.

As the early disciples learned to reflect upon the fact of Christ's Resurrection, its riches unfolded themselves by degrees, and the earliest aspect of its 'power' was the light it shed on His person and work. Taught

by it, as we have seen, they recognised Him for the Messiah whom they had long expected, and for something more—the Incarnate Son of God. That phase of their joy belongs to us too. If Christ, who made such avowals of His nature as we know that He did, and hazarded such assertions of His claims, His personality and His office, as fill the Gospels, were really laid in the grave and saw corruption, then the assertions are disproved, the claims unwarranted, the office a figment of His imagination. He may still remain a great teacher, with a tremendous deduction to be made from the worth of His teaching, but all that is deepest in His own words about Himself and His relation to men must be sorrowfully put on one side. But if He, after such assertions and claims, rose from the dead, and rising, dieth no more, then for the last time, and in the mightiest tones, the voice that rent the heavens at His baptism and His transfiguration proclaims: ‘This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.’ Our joy in His Resurrection is the joy of those to whom He is therein declared to be the Son of God, and who see in Christ risen their accepted Sacrifice, and their ever-living Redeemer.

Such was the earliest effect of the Resurrection of Jesus, if we trust the records of apostolic preaching. Then by degrees the joyful thought took shape in the Church’s consciousness that their Shepherd had gone before them into the dark pen where Death pastured his flocks, and had taken it for His own, for the quiet resting-place where He would make them lie down by still waters, and whence He would lead them out to the lofty mountains where His fold should be. The power of Christ’s Resurrection as the pattern and pledge of ours is the final source of the joy which

may fill our hearts as we turn away from that empty sepulchre.

The world has guessed and feared, or guessed and hoped, but always guessed and doubted the life beyond. Analogies, poetic adumbrations, probabilities drawn from consciousness and from conscience, from intuition and from anticipation, are but poor foundations on which to build a solid faith. But to those to whom the Resurrection of Christ is a fact their own future life is a fact. Here we have a solid certainty, and here alone. The heart says as we lay our dear ones in the grave, 'Surely we part not for ever.' The conscience says, as it points us to our own evil deeds, 'After death the judgment.' A deep indestructible instinct prophesies in every breast of a future. But all is vague and doubtful. The one proof of a life beyond the grave is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore let us be glad with the gladness of men plucked from a dark abyss of doubt and planted on the rock of solid certainty; and let us rejoice with joy unspeakable, and laden with a prophetic weight of glory, as we ring out the ancient Easter morning's greeting, 'The Lord is risen indeed!'

THE FOOD OF THE WORLD

'He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. 20. And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.'—MATT. xiv. 19, 20.

THE miracles of Scripture are not merely wonders, but signs. It is one of their most striking characteristics that they are not, like the pretended portents of false faiths, mere mighty deeds standing in no sort

of intellectual relation to the message of which they claim to be the attestation, but that they have themselves a doctrinal significance. Our Lord's miracles have been called 'the great bell before the sermon,' but they are more than that. They are themselves no unimportant part of the sermon. In fact, it would not be difficult to construct from them a revelation of His nature, person, and work, scarcely less full and explicit than that contained in His words, or even than that more systematic and developed one which we receive in the writings of His apostles.

This miracle, for instance, of the feeding of the five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes, is one of the few which the Apostle John relates in his Gospel, and his reason for selecting it seems to be the commentary with which our Lord followed it, and which John alone has preserved. That commentary is all the wonderful discourse about Christ as the bread of life, and eating His flesh as our means of receiving His life into ourselves. We are warranted, then, in regarding this miracle as a symbolic revelation of Christ as supplying all the wants of this hungry world. If so, we may perhaps venture to take one more step, and regard the manner in which He dispenses His gifts as also significant. His agents are His disciples, or as would appear probable from the twelve baskets full of fragments, the twelve apostles, the nucleus and representatives of His Church. Thus we come to the point from which we wish to regard this narrative now. There are three stages in the words of our text—the distribution, the meal, and the gathering up of the abundance that was left. These three stages may guide us to some thoughts regarding the work to which Christ calls His Church, the success

which attends it, and the results to the distributors themselves.

I. Christ feeds the famishing world by means of His Church.

‘He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the *disciples* to the multitude.’ One very striking feature in all our Lord’s miracles is economy of power. The miraculous element being admitted for some good and sufficient reason, it is kept down to the lowest possible point. Precisely so much of it as is needed is permitted, and not one hairsbreadth more. It does not begin to make its appearance at any point in the process where ordinary human agency can be used. It does not produce a result beyond the actual necessity. It does not last one instant longer than is required. It inosculates closely with the natural order of things.

Take an illustration from the beginning of miracles where Jesus manifested forth His glory, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee—that great miracle in which our Lord hallowed the ties of human affection, and consecrated the joy of united hearts. The necessity is felt before He supplies it. The servants fill the waterpots. The water is used as the material on which the miraculous power operates. Only so much as is drawn for present use becomes wine. The servants are used as the agents for the distribution, and all is done so unostentatiously, though it be the manifesting of His glory, that no man knows but they.

Take another illustration from the other great contrasted miracle at the grave of Lazarus, where our Lord hallowed the breaking of earthly bonds by death, and sanctified the sorrows of parted love. He does not work His wonder from the other side Jordan, but comes. He does not avert the death which He will

conquer, nor prevent the grief which He shares. He goes to the side of the grave—true human tears are wet upon His cheek. They have to roll away the stone. Then, there is flung into the darkness of the tomb the mighty word, ‘Lazarus! come forth.’ The inconceivable miraculous act is done, and life stirs in the sheeted dead. But there the miraculous ceases. The man with his restored life has himself to come out of the grave, and human hands have tremblingly to lift the napkin from the veiled face (how they must have thrilled as they did it, wondering what nameless horror they might see in the eyes that had looked on the inner chamber of death), and human help has to unfold the grave-clothes from the tightly swathed and stumbling limbs, ‘Loose him, and let him go.’

This marked characteristic of all our Lord’s miracles is full of instruction, which it would lead us too far from our present purpose to indicate at any length. But we may just observe in passing, that it brings these into striking parallel with the divine creative act, where there is ever the same precise adaptation of power employed to result contemplated, the same background of veiled omnipotence, the same emergence of proportioned, adequate, but not superfluous force, so that, in fact, economy of power may be said to be the very signature and broad arrow of divinity stamped on all His works. Again, it presents a broad contrast to the wild, reckless miracle-mongering of false faiths, and is at once a test of the genuineness of all ‘lying signs and wonders,’ and an indication of the self-restraint of the Worker, and of the fine sanity and truthfulness of the narrators, of these Gospel miracles. And yet, again, it is one phase of the disciplinary character of the whole revelation of God in Christ—not obtrusive,

though obvious, capable of being overlooked if men will. 'There was the hiding of His power. 'If any man wills to be ignorant, let him be ignorant.'

But coming more immediately to the narrative before us, we find this same characteristic in full prominence in it. The people are allowed to hunger. The disciples are permitted to feel themselves at their wits' end. They are bid to bring their poor resources to Christ. The lad who had come with his little store, perhaps a fisherman's boy from some of the lake villages who hoped to sell his loaves and fishes in the crowd, supplies the material on which Christ wills to exercise His miraculous power. The disciples' agency is pressed into the service. Each man separately receives his portion, and when all are supplied, the fragments are carefully preserved for the use of those who had been fed by miracle, and of Him who had fed them!

Besides the general lessons already referred to, as naturally arising from this feature of the miracle, there is that one which belongs to it especially, namely, that Christ feeds the famishing world by means of His Church.

Precisely as in the miracles in general, so in the work of Christ as a whole, the field of supernatural intervention is rigidly confined, and fits in with the established order of things. The Incarnation and Sacrifice of our Lord are the purely supernatural work of the divine Power and Mercy. He comes, enters into our human conditions, assumes our humanity, dies the death for us all. 'I have trodden the wine-press alone.' There is no question of any human agency co-operating there, any more than there is in the word 'Lazarus, come forth,' or in the multiplication of the loaves. There, by Christ alone, is brought to us and is finished for us an

eternal redemption, with which the whole race of man have nothing to do but to receive it, to eat and be filled. But this having been done by the solitary work of Jesus Christ, this new power having been introduced into the world, human agency is henceforth called into operation to diffuse it, just as the servants at Cana had to draw the wine which He had made, just as the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias have to give to the multitude the bread which was blessed and broken by His hands.

The supernaturally given Bread of Life is to be carried over the world in accordance with the ordinary laws by which all other truth is diffused and all other gifts that belong to one man are held by him in stewardship for all his fellows. True, there is ever in and with that word of life a divine Spirit, which is the real cause of its progress, which guards it from destruction though all men were faithless, and keeps it alive though all Israel bowed the knee to Baal. But, however easy it may be for us to confuse ourselves with metaphysical puzzles about the relation between the natural and the supernatural elements—the human agency and the divine energiser—in the successful discharge of the Church's work, practically the matter is very plain.

The truth that it behoves us all to lay to heart is just this—that Christian people are Christ's instruments for effecting the realisation of the purposes of His death. Not without them shall He see of the travail of His soul. Not without them shall the preaching be fully known. Not without the people willing in the day of His power, and clothed in priestly beauty, shall the Priest King set His feet upon His enemies. Not without the armies of heaven following Him, shall the 'Word of God' ride forth to victory. Neither the divine decree, nor the expansive power of the Truth,

nor the crowned expectancy of the waiting Lord, nor the mighty working of the Comforter, are the complete means for the accomplishment of the divine promise that all nations shall be blessed in Him. Could all these be conceived of as existing without the service and energies of God's Church proclaiming the name of Christ, they were not enough. He has willed that to us, less than the least of all saints, should this grace be given, that we should make known the unsearchable riches of Christ. God reveals His truth, that men who believe it may impart it. God gives the word, that, caught up by those who receive it into an honest and good heart, it may be poured forth, in mighty chorus from the lips of the 'great company of them that publish it.' 'He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the *disciples* to the multitude.'

Christian men! learn your high vocation, and your solemn responsibilities. 'What! came the word of God out from you, or came it *unto* you only?' For what did you receive it? For the same reason for which you have received everything else which you possess—that you might share it with your brethren. How did you receive it? As a gift, unmerited, the result of a miracle of divine mercy, that you might feel bound to give as ye have received, and spread the free divine gift by cheerful human work of distribution. From whom did you receive it? From Christ, who in the very act of giving binds you to live for Him and not for yourselves, and to mould your lives after the pattern of His. What a multitude of motives converge on the solemn duty of work for Christ, if we read in the light of this deeper meaning the simple words of our text, 'He gave the loaves to the disciples!' What manner of servant is he who can bear to have no part in her

blessed work that follows—‘and the disciples to the multitude’?

It is further noticeable how these apostles were prepared for the work which they had to do. The first lesson which they had to learn was the almost ludicrous disproportion between the resources at their command and the necessities of the crowd. ‘How many loaves have ye? go and see.’ And this is the first lesson that we have to learn in all our work for Christ and for our brethren, that in ourselves we have nothing fit for the task before us. Think of what that task is as measured by the necessities and sorrows of men. Think of all the sighs that go up at every moment from burdened hearts, of the tears that run down so many blanched and anxious cheeks. Think of ‘*all* the misery that is done under the sun!’ If it could be made visible, what a dark pall would swathe the world, an atmosphere of sorrow rolling ever with it through space. The sight is too sad to be seen by any but by Him who cures it all, and it wrung from His heart the sigh with which ere He cured one poor sufferer—a drop in the ocean—He looked up to heaven, as in mute appeal against all these heaped miseries of suffering man.

And we, what can we do in ourselves? On what comparison of our resources do we not feel utterly inadequate to the work? If we think of the proportion in numbers, we have to say, like the narrator of the wars in Israel, ‘The children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids, but the Syrians filled the country.’ If we think of the strength that we ourselves possess and look at our own tremulous faith, at our own feeble love, at the uncertain hold which we ourselves have on the Gospel that we pro-

fess, at the mists and darkness which cover so much of God's revelation from our own understandings, at the sins and faults of our own lives, must we not cry out, Send whom Thou wilt send, O Lord, but take not me, so sinful, so little influenced by Thy grace, to be the messenger of Thy grace? 'Who is sufficient for these things?'

And such contemplations, when they drive home to our hearts the wholesome lesson of our own weakness, are the beginning, and the only possible beginning, of divine strength. The only temper in which we can serve God and bless man is that of lowliest self-abasement. God works with bruised reeds, and out of them makes polished shafts, pillars in His house. Only when we are low on our faces before God, crying out, 'Unclean, unclean,' does the purifying coal touch our lips and the prophet strength flow into our souls.

Be humble and self-distrustful, and then learn the further lesson of this narrative, and carry your poor inadequate resources to Christ. 'Bring them hither to Me.' In His hands they become sufficient. He multiplies them. He gives wisdom, strength, and all that fits for the task to which He calls us. Bring your little faith to Him and He will increase it. Bring your feeble love to Him, and ask Him to kindle it from the pure flame of His own, and He will make your heart burn within you. Bring your partial understanding of His will and way to Him, and He will be to you wisdom. Bring all the poverty of your natures, all the insufficiency of your religious character, all the inadequacy of your poor work, to your Lord. Feel it all. Let the conviction of your nothingness sink into your soul. Then wait before Him in simple faith, in lowly obedience, and power will come to you equal to your desire and

to your duties, and He will put His spirit upon you, and will anoint you to proclaim liberty to the captives and to give bread to all the hungry. 'Who is sufficient for these things?' must ever precede, and will ever be followed by, 'our sufficiency is of God.'

Mark again that the disciples seem themselves to have partaken of the bread before they parted it among the multitudes. That is our true preparation for the work of feeding the hungry. The Church which feeds the world is able to do so, only because, and in proportion as, it has found in Christ its own sustenance and life. It is only they who can say 'we have tasted and felt and handled of the word of life' who can declare it to others. Personal participation in the bread of life makes any man able to offer it to some fainting spirit. Nothing else makes him able. Ability involves responsibility. 'Power to its last particle is duty.' You, dear friends, who have 'tasted that the Lord is gracious,' have thereby come under weighty obligations. Your own personal experience of that precious bread has fitted you to do something in offering it to others. The manner in which you do so must be determined by your character and circumstances. Every one has his proper walk; but something you can do. To some lips you can commend the food for all the world. Somewhere your word is a power. See that you do what you can do. Remember that Christ feeds the world by His Church, and that every man who has himself eaten of the bread of life is thereby consecrated to carry it to those who yet are perishing in the far-off hunger-ridden land, and trying to fill their bellies with the husks that the swine eat.

II. The Bread is enough for all the world.

'They did all eat and were filled.' One can fancy

how doubtingly and grudgingly the apostles doled out the supplies at first, and how the portion of each was increased, as group after group was provided, and no diminution appeared in Christ's full hands, until, at last, all the five thousand, of all ages, of both sexes, of every sort, were fed, and the fragments lying uncared for proved how sufficient had been the share of each.

May we not see in that scene a picture of the full supply for all the wants of the whole world which there is in that Bread of Life which came down from heaven? The Gospel proclaims a full feast, which is enough for all mankind, which is intended for all mankind, which shall one day satisfy all mankind.

This universal adaptation of the message of the Gospel to the whole world arises from the obvious fact that it addresses itself to universal wants, to the great rudimentary, universally diffused characteristics of human nature, and that it provides for all these, in the grand simplicity of its good tidings, the one sufficing word. It entangles itself with no local or historical peculiarities of the time and place of its earthly origin, which can hinder it in its universal diffusion. It commits itself to no transient human opinions. It addresses itself to no sectional characteristics of classes of men. It brushes aside all the surface distinctions which separate us from one another, and goes right down to the depths of the central identities in which we are all alike. However we may differ from one another, in training, in habits, in cast of thought, in idiosyncrasies of character, in circumstances, in age—all these are but the upper strata which vary locally. Beneath all these there lie everywhere the solid foundations of the primeval rocks, and beneath these, again, the glowing central mass, the

flaming heart of the world. Christianity sends its shaft right down through all these upper and local beds, till it reaches the deepest depths which are the same in every man—the obstinate wilfulness of a nature averse from God, and the yet deeper-lying longings of a soul that flames with the consciousness of God, and yearns for rest and peace. To the sense of sin, to the sense of sorrow, to the conscience never wholly stifled, to the desires after good never utterly eradicated and never slaked by aught besides itself, does this mighty word come. Not to this or that sort of man, not to men in this or that phase of progress, age of the world, or stage of civilisation, does it address itself, but to the common humanity which belongs to all, to the wants and sorrows and inward consciousness which belong to man as man, be he philosopher or fool, king or slave, Eastern or Western, ‘pagan suckled in a creed outworn,’ or Englishman with the new lights and material science of this twentieth century.

Hence its universal adaptation to mankind. It alone of all so-called faiths overleaps all geographical limits and lives in all centuries. It alone wins its trophies and bestows its gifts on all sorts and conditions of men. Other plants which the ‘Heavenly Father hath not planted’ have their zones of vegetation and die outside certain degrees of latitude, but the seed of the kingdom is like corn, an exotic nowhere, for wherever man lives it will grow, and yet an exotic everywhere, for it came down from heaven. Other food requires an educated palate for its appreciation, but any hungry man in any land will relish bread. For every soul on earth this living dying love of the Lord Jesus Christ addresses itself to, and satisfies, his deepest wants. It is the bread which gives life to the world.

And one of the constituents of that company by the Galilean lake was children. It is one great glory of Christianity that its merciful mysteries can find their way to the hearts of the little children. Its mysteries, we say—for the Gospel has its mysteries no less than these old systems of heathenism which fenced round their deepest truths with solemn barriers, only to be passed by the initiated. But the difference lies here—that its mysteries are taught at first to the neophytes, and that the sum of them lies in the words which we learned at our mother's knees so long ago that we have forgotten that they were ever new to us: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life.' The little child who has learned his earliest lessons of what father and son, loving and giving, trust and life mean, by the sweet experiences of his own father's home and his own mother's love, can grasp these blessed words. They carry the deepest mysteries which will still gleam before us unfathomed in all their profundity, unappropriated in all their blessedness, when millenniums have passed since we stood in the inner shrine of heaven. Wonderful is the word which blesses the child, which transcends the angel before the throne!

This is the bread for the world—meant for it, and one day to be partaken of by it. For these ordered fifties at their Christ-provided meal are for us a prophecy of the day that shall surely dawn, when all the hunger of wandering prodigals is over, and the deceived heart of the idol-worshipper no longer drawing him aside to feed on ashes, they shall come from the East and from the West, and from the North and from the South, and sit at the feast which the Lord hath pre-

pared for all nations, and when all the earth shall be satisfied with the goodness of His house, even of His holy temple.

III. The Bread which is given to the famishing is multiplied for the future of the Distributors.

‘They took of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.’ More was gathered than they had possessed at first. They preserved over, for their own sustenance and refreshment in days to come, a far larger store than the five loaves and two small fishes with which they had begun. The fact contains a principle which is true about almost all except material possessions, which is often in God’s providence made true about them, and which is emphatically true about spiritual blessings, about our religious emotions, our Christian beliefs, the joys and powers which Christ comes to give.

For all these, the condition of increase is diffusion. To impart to others is to gain for oneself. Every honest effort to bring some other human heart into conscious possession of Christ’s love deepens one’s own sense of its preciousness. Every attempt to lead some other understanding to the perception of the truth, as it is in Jesus, helps me to understand it better myself. If you would learn, teach. That will clear your mind, will open hidden harmonies, will reveal unsuspected deficiencies and contradictions in your own conceptions, will help you to feel more the truths that come from your lips. It will perhaps shame your cold appreciation of them, when you see how others grasp at them from your teaching, or give you more confidence in the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation, when you behold it, even as ministered through you, mighty to pull down strongholds. At the lowest, it will keep

your own mind in healthy contact with what you are but too apt to forget. If you would learn to love Christ more, try to lead some one else to love Him. You will catch new gleams from His gracious heart in the very act of commending Him to others. If you would have your own spiritual life strengthened and deepened, remember that not by solitary meditation or raptures of silent communion alone can that be accomplished, but by these and by honest manful work for God in the world. The Mount of Transfiguration must be left, although there were there Moses and Elias, and the cloud of the divine glory and the words of approval from heaven, because there were a demoniac boy and his weeping, despairing father needing Christ down below. Work for God if you would live with God. Give the bread to the hungry, if you would have it for the food of your own souls.

The refusal to engage in such service is one fruitful cause of the low state of spiritual health in which so many Christians pass their days. They seem to think that they receive the bread from heaven only for their own use, and that they have done all that they have to do with it, when they eat it themselves. And so come all manner of spiritual diseases. A selfish, that is an inactive, religion is always more or less a morbid religion. For health you need exercise. 'In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread'; that law expresses not only the fact that work is needed to get it, but that toil must give the appetite and fit the frame to digest it. There is such a thing as a morbid Christianity brought on by want of healthy exercise.

'There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty.' Good husbandry does not grind

up all the year's wheat for loaves for one's own eating, but keeps some of it for seed to be scattered in the furrows. And if Christian men will deal with the great love of God, the great work of Christ, the great message of the Gospel, as if it were bestowed on them for their own sakes only, they will have only themselves to blame if holy desires die out in their hearts, and the consciousness of Christ's love becomes faint, and all the blessed words of truth come to sound far off and mythical in their ears. The standing water gets green scum on it. The close-shut barn breeds weevils and smut. Let the water run. Fling the seed broadcast. 'Thou shalt find it after many days,' bread for thy own soul—even as these ministering apostles were enriched whilst they gave, and the full-handed liberality 'with which they carried Christ's gifts among the crowd' had something to do in providing the large residue which filled their stores for days to come.

Thus, then, this scene on the sweet springing grass down by the side of blue Gennesaret is an emblem of the whole work of the Church in this starving world. The multitudes famish. Tell Christ of their wants. Count your own small resources till you have completely learned your poverty, then take them to Jesus. He will accept them, and in His hands they will become mighty, being transfigured from human thoughts and forces into divine words, into spiritual powers. On that bread which He gives, do you yourselves live. Then carry it boldly to all the hungry. Rank after rank will eat. All races, all ages, from grey hairs to babbling childhood, will find there the food of their souls. As you part the blessing, it will grow beneath His eye; and the longer you give, the fuller-handed you will become. Nor shall the bread fail, nor the

word become weak, till all the world has tasted of its sweetness and been refreshed by its potent life.

This miracle is the lesson for the workers. There is another wondrous meal recorded in Scripture, which is the prophecy for the workers when they rest. The little ship has been tossing all the night on the waters of that Galilean lake. Fruitless has been the fishing. The morning breaks cold and grey, and lo! there stands on the shore One who first blesses the toilers' work, and then bids them to His table. There, mysteriously kindled, burns the fire with the welcome meal already laid upon it. They add to it the contribution of their night of toil, and then, hushed and blessed in His still company, they sup with Him and He with them. So when the weary work is over for the Church on earth, we shall be aware of His merciful presence on the shore, and, coming at the last safe to land, we shall 'rest from our labours,' in that we see the 'fire of coals, and fish laid thereon and bread'; and our 'works shall follow us,' in that we are 'bidden to bring of the fish that we have caught.' Then, putting off the wet fisher's coat, and leaving behind the tossing of the unquiet sea and the toil of the weary fishing, we shall sit down with Him at that meal spread by His hands, who blesseth the works of His servants here below, and giveth to them a full fruition of immortal food at His table at the last.

THE KING'S HIGHWAY

'And straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. 23. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. 24. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. 25. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. 26. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a

spirit; and they cried out for fear. 27. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. 28. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. 29. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. 30. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. 31. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? 32. And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. 33. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God. 34. And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. 35. And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased; 36. And besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.'—MATT. xiv. 22-36.

THE haste and urgency with which the disciples were sent away, against their will, after the miracle of feeding the five thousand, is explained in John's account. The crowd had been excited to a dangerous enthusiasm by a miracle so level to their tastes. A prophet who could feed them was something like a prophet. So they determine to make him a king. Our Lord, fearing the outburst, resolves to withdraw into the lonely hills, that the fickle blaze may die down. If the disciples had remained with Him, He could not have so easily stolen away, and they might have caught the popular fervour. To divide would distract the crowd, and make it easier for Him to disperse them, while many of them, as really happened, would be likely to set off by land for Capernaum, when they saw the boat had gone. The main teaching of this miracle, over and above its demonstration of the Messianic power of our Lord, is symbolical. All the miracles are parables, and this eminently so. Thus regarding it, we have—

I. The struggling toilers and the absent Christ.

They had a short row of some five or six miles in prospect, when they started in the early evening. An hour or so might have done it, but, for some unknown reason, they lingered. Perhaps instead of pulling

across, they may have kept inshore, by the head of the lake, expecting Jesus to join them at some point. Thus, night finds them but a short way on their voyage. The paschal moon would be shining down on them, and perhaps in their eager talk about the miracle they had just seen, they did not make much speed. A sudden breeze sprang up, as is common at nightfall on mountain lakes; and soon a gale, against which they could make no headway, was blowing in their teeth. This lasted for eight or nine hours. Wet and weary, they tugged at the oars through the live-long night, the seas breaking over them, and the wind howling down the glens.

They had been caught in a similar storm once before, but then He had been on board, and it was daylight. Now it was dark, 'and Jesus had not yet come to them.' How they would look back at the dim outline of the hills, where they knew He was, and wonder why He had sent them out into the tempest alone! Mark tells us that He saw them distressed, hours before He came to them, and that makes His desertion the stranger. It is but His method of lovingly training them to do without His personal presence, and a symbol of what is to be the life of His people till the end. He is on the mountain in prayer, and He sees the labouring boat and the distressed rowers. The contrast is the same as is given in the last verses of Mark's Gospel, where the serene composure of the Lord, sitting at the right hand of God, is sharply set over against the wandering, toiling lives of His servants, in their evangelistic mission. The commander-in-chief sits apart on the hill, directing the fight, and sending regiment after regiment to their deaths. Does that mean indifference? So it might

seem but for the words which follow, 'the Lord working with them.' He shares in all the toil; and the lifting up of His holy hands sways the current of the fight, and inclines the balance. His love appoints effort and persistent struggle as the law of our lives. Nor are we to mourn or wonder; for the purpose of the appointment, so far as we are concerned, is to make character, and to give us 'the wrestling thews that throw the world.' Difficulties make men of us. Summer sailors, yachting in smooth water, have neither the joy of conflict nor the vigour which it gives. Better the darkness, when we cannot see our way, and the wind in our faces, if the good of things is to be estimated by their power to 'strengthen us with strength in our soul!'

II. We have the approaching Christ.

Not till the last watch of the night does He come, when they have long struggled, and the boat is out in the very middle of the lake, and the storm is fiercest. We may learn from this the delays of His love. Because He loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, He stayed still, in strange inaction, for two days, after their message. Because He loved Peter and the praying band, He let him lie in prison till the last hour of the last watch of the last night before his intended execution, and then delivered him with a leisureliness (making him put on article after article of dress) which tells of conscious omnipotence. Heaven's clock goes at a different rate from our little timepieces. God's day is a thousand years, and the longest tarrying is but 'a little while.' When He has come, we find that it is 'right early,' though before He came He seemed to us to delay. He comes across the waves. Their restless and yielding crests are smoothed and made solid by the touch

of His foot. 'He walketh on the sea as on a pavement' (Septuagint version of Job ix. 8). It is a revelation of divine power. It is one of the very few miracles affecting Christ's own person, and may perhaps be regarded as being, like the Transfiguration, a casual gleam of latent glory breaking through the body of His humiliation, and so, in some sense, prophetic. But it is also symbolic. He ever uses tumults and unrest as a means of advancing His purposes. The stormy sea is the recognised Old Testament emblem of antagonism to the divine rule; and just as He walked on the billows, so does He reach His end by the very opposition to it, 'girding Himself' with the wrath of men, and making it to praise Him. In this sense, too, His 'paths are in the great waters.' In another aspect, we have here the symbol of Christ's using our difficulties and trials as the means of His loving approach to us. He comes, giving a deeper and more blessed sense of His presence by means of our sorrows, than in calm sunny weather. It is generally over a stormy sea that He comes to us, and golden treasures are thrown on our shores after a tempest.

III. We have the terror and the recognition.

The disciples were as yet little lifted above their fellows; they had no expectation of His coming, and thought just what any rude minds would have thought, that this mysterious Thing stalking towards them across the waters came from the unseen world, and probably that it was the herald of their drowning. Terror froze their blood, and brought out a shriek (as the word might be rendered) which was heard above the dash of waves and the raving wind. They had gallantly fought the tempest, but this unmanned

them. We too often mistake Christ, when He comes to us. We do not recognise His working in the storm, nor His presence giving power to battle with it. We are so absorbed in the circumstances that we fail to see Him through them. Our tears weave a veil which hides Him, or the darkness obscures His face, and we see nothing but the threatening crests of the waves, curling high above our little boat. We mistake our best friend, and we are afraid of Him as we dimly see Him; and sometimes we think that the tokens of His presence are only phantasms of our own imagination.

They who were deceived by His appearance knew Him by His voice, as Mary did at the sepulchre. How blessed must have been the moment when that astounding certitude thrilled through their souls! That low voice is audible through all the tumult. He speaks to us by His word, and by the silent speech in our spirits, which makes us conscious that He is there. He does speak to us in the deepest of our sorrows, in the darkest of our nights; and when we hear of His voice, and with wonder and joy cry out, 'It is the Lord,' our sorrow is soothed, and the darkness is light about us.

The consciousness of His presence banishes all fear. 'Be not afraid,' follows 'It is I.' It is of no use to preach courage unless we preach Christ first. If we have not Him with us, we do well to fear: His presence is the only rational foundation for calm fearlessness. Only when the Lord of Hosts is with us, ought we not to fear, 'though the waters roar . . . and be troubled.' 'Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves' can we feeble creatures face all terrors, and feel no terror.

IV. We have the end of the storm and of the voyage.

The storm ceases as soon as Jesus is on board. John does not mention the cessation of the tempest, but tells us that they were immediately at the shore. It does not seem necessary to suppose another miracle, but only that the voyage ended very speedily. It is not always true that His presence is the end of dangers and difficulties, but the consciousness of His presence does hush the storm. The worst of trouble is gone when we know that He shares it; and though the long swell after the gale may last, it no longer threatens. Nor is it always true that His coming, and our consciousness that He has come, bring a speedy close to toils. We have to labour on, but in how different a mood these men would bend to their oars after they had Him on board! With Him beside us toil is sweet, burdens are lighter, and the road is shortened. Even with Him on board, life is a stormy voyage; but without Him, it ends in shipwreck. With Him, it may be long, but it will look all the shorter while it lasts, and when we land the rough weather will be remembered but as a transient squall. These wearied rowers, who had toiled all night, stepped on shore as the morning broke on the eastern bank. So we, if we have had Him for our shipmate, shall land on the eternal shore, and dry our wet garments in the sunshine, and all the stormy years that seemed so long shall be remembered but as a watch in the night.

PETER ON THE WAVES

‘ And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.’—MATT. xiv. 28.

WE owe this account of an episode in the miracle of Christ’s walking on the waters to Matthew alone. Singularly enough there is no reference to Peter’s venturesomeness and failure in the Gospel which is generally believed to have been written under his special inspection and suggestion. Mark passes by that part of the narrative without a word. That may be because Peter was somewhat ashamed of it, or it may be from a natural disinclination to make himself prominent in the story at all. But, whatever the reason, we may be thankful that in this first Gospel we have the story, for it is not only interesting as illustrating the characteristics of the apostle in a very picturesque fashion, but also as carrying in it very plainly large lessons that are of use for us all.

I. Note, first, Peter’s venturesomeness, half faith, and half presumption.

There is a singular mixture of good and bad in it. Looked at one way, it seems all right; like a bit of shot silk, in one light it is bright, and in another it is black enough. What was good in it? Well, there was the man’s out-and-out confidence in his Master; and there was, further, the unconsidered, instinctive shoot of love in his heart to the mysterious figure standing there upon the water, so that his desire was to be beside Him. It was far more ‘Bid me come to *Thee*,’ than ‘Bid me come to *Thee on the water*.’ The incident was a kind of rehearsal, with a noticeable difference, and yet with nearly parallel circumstances, of the other

incident when, after the Resurrection, he discovered the Lord standing on the shore, and floundered through the water anyhow; whether on it or in it did not matter to him, so long as he could get near his Master. But though the apostle's action was blended with a great deal that was childish and sensuous, and was perhaps quite as much the result of mere temperament as of conscious affection, still there was good in that eager longing to be beside his Lord, which it would be well for us if we in some measure shared, and in that indifference to the perils of the strange path so long as it led to Christ's side, which, if it were ours, would ennoble our lives, and in that perfect confidence that Christ could enable him to tread the unquiet sea, which would make us lords of all storms, if it wrought in us.

What was bad in it? First, the characteristic pushing of himself to the front, and wish to be singled out from his brethren by some special token. 'Bid *me* come.' Why should he be bidden any more than John, who sits quietly and gazes, or the others, who are tugging at the oars? Then the impetuous rashness and signal over-estimate of his own capacity and courage were bad. Perhaps, too, there was a little dash of a boyish kind of wish to do a strange thing, and now that he sees his Master there, walking on the waters, he thinks he would like to try it too. So the request is a rash, self-confident pushing of himself before his brethren into circumstances of wholly unnecessary peril and trial, of which he had not estimated the severity till he felt the water beginning to yield under his feet and the wind smiting him on the face. So that the incident is a rehearsal and anticipation of the precisely similar thing that he did when, on

the morning of Christ's trial, he shouldered himself unnecessarily into the high priest's palace, and got himself close up against the fire there, without a moment's reflection on the possible danger he was running of having his loyalty melted by a fiercer flame, and little dreaming that he was going to fall, and all his courage to ooze out at his finger-ends, before the sharp tongue of a maid-servant. In like manner as he says here, 'Bid me come to Thee,' without the smallest doubt that when he was bade to come he would be able to do it, so he said that night: 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I,'—and yet he denied Him.

Let us take the warning from this venturesomeness of a generous, impulsive, enthusiastic religious nature, and remember that the most genuine faith and religious emotion need to be sobered and steadied by reflection, and by searching into our own motives, before we venture upon the water, howsoever much we may wish to go there. Make very sure that your zeal for the Lord has an element of sober permanence in it, and that it is the result, not of a mere transitory feeling, but of a steady, settled purpose. And do not push yourself voluntarily into places of peril or of difficulty, where the fighting is hard and the fire heavy, unless you have reasonable grounds for believing that you can stand the strain. Bring quiet, sober reason into the loftiest and loveliest enthusiasm of your faith, and then there will be something in it that will live through storm, and walk the water with unwetted and unsinking foot. An impure alloy of selfish itching for pre-eminence and distinction does not seldom mingle with the fine gold of religious enthusiasm and desire to serve and be near our Lord. Therefore we have to

test our motives and seek to refine our purest emotions, and the more scrupulously the purer they seem, lest we be yielding to the impulses of self while we fancy that we are being drawn by the magnetism of Christ.

II. We have here the momentary triumph and swift collapse of an impure faith.

One can fancy with what hushed expectation the other apostles looked at Peter as he let himself down over the side of the ship, and his feet touched the surges and did not sink. Christ's grave, single-worded answer 'Come' barely sanctions the apostle's request. It is at most a permission, but scarcely a command, and it is permission to try, in order that Peter may learn his own weakness. He did walk on the water to go to Jesus. What kept him up? Not Christ's hand, nor any power bestowed on the apostle, but simply the exercise of Christ's will. But if he was held up by the operation of that will, why did he begin to sink? The vivid narrative tells us: 'When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid.' That was why. It had been blowing every bit as hard before he stepped out of the ship. The waves were not running any higher after than when he said, 'Bid me come to Thee.' But he was down amongst them, and that makes a wonderful difference. For a moment he stood, and then the peril into which he had so heedlessly thrust himself began to tell on him. Presumption subsided swiftly into fright, as it usually does, and fear began to fulfil itself, as it usually does. 'He became afraid,' and that made him heavy and he began to sink. Not because the gale was any more violent, not because the uneven pavement was any more yielding, but because he was frightened, and his faith began to falter at the close sight of the danger.

And why did the ebbing away of faith mean the withdrawal of Christ's will to keep him up? Why? Because it could not but be so. There is only one door through which Christ's upholding power gets into a man, and that is the door of the man's trust in the power; and if he shuts the door, the power stops outside. So Peter went down. The text does not tell us how far down he went. Depend upon it, it was further than over the shoes! But he went down because he began to lose his trust that Christ could hold him up; and when he lost his trust, Christ lost His power over him.

All this is a parable, carrying very plain and important lessons. We are upborne by Christ's power, and that power, working on and in our weakness, invests us with prerogatives in some measure like His own. If He can stand quiet on the heaving wave, so can His servant. 'The works that I do shall ye do also'—and 'the depths of the sea "become" a way for the ransomed to pass over.' That power is exercised on condition of our faith. As soon as faith ceases the influx of His grace is stayed. Peter, though probably he was not thinking of this incident, has put the whole philosophy of it into plain words in his own letter, when he says, 'You who are kept *by* the power of God *through* faith unto salvation.' He was held up as long as he believed. His belief was a hand, and that which it grasped was what held him up, and that was Christ's will and power. So we shall be held up everywhere, and in any storm, as long as, and no longer than, we set our confidence upon Him.

Our faith is sure to fail when we turn away our eyes from Christ to look at the tempest and the

dangers. If we keep our gaze fixed upon Him, the consciousness and the confidence of His all-sustaining power will hold us up. If once we turn aside to look at the waves as they heave, and prick our ears to listen to the wind as it whistles, then we shall begin to doubt whether He is able to keep us up. 'Looking off' from all these dangers 'unto Jesus' is needful if we are to run the race set before us.

A man walking along a narrow ledge of some Alpine height has only one chance of safety, and that is, not to look at his feet or at the icy rocks beside him, or at the gulf beneath, into which he will be dashed if he gazes down. He must look up and onwards, and then he will walk along a knife-edge, and he shall not fall. So, Peter, never mind the water, never mind the wind; look at Jesus and you will get to Him dry shod. If you turn away your eyes from Him, and take counsel of the difficulties and trials and antagonisms, down you will be sure to go. 'They sank to the bottom like a stone, the depths covered them.' Christ holds us up. He cannot hold us up unless we trust Him. Faith and fear contend for supremacy in our hearts. If we rightly trust, we shall not be afraid. If we are afraid, terror will slay trust. To look away from Christ, and occupy our thoughts with dangers and obstacles, is sure to lead to the collapse of faith and the strengthening of terror. To look past and above the billows to Him that stands on them is sure to cast out fear and to hearten faith. Peter ignored the danger at the wrong time, before he dropped over the side of the boat, and he was aware of it at the wrong time, while he was actually being held up and delivered from it. Rashness ignores peril in the wrong way, and thereby ensures its falling on the presumptuous head. Faith

ignores it in the right way, by letting the eye travel past it, to Christ who shields from it, and thereby faith brings about the security it expects, and annihilates the peril from which it looks away to Jesus.

III. We have here the cry of desperate faith and its immediate answer.

The very thing which had broken Peter's faith mended it again. Fear sunk him by making him falter in his confidence; and, as he was sinking, the very desperation of his terror drove him back to his faith, and he 'cried' with a shrill, loud voice, heard above the roar of the boisterous wind, 'Lord, save me.' So difficulties and dangers, when they begin to tell upon us, often send us back to the trust which the anticipation of them had broken; and out of the very extremity of fear we sometimes can draw its own antidote. Just as with flint and steel you may strike a spark, so danger, striking against our heart, brings out the flash that kindles the tinder.

This brief cry for help singularly blends faith and fear. There is faith in it, else Peter would not have appealed to Christ to save him. There is mortal terror in it, else he would not have felt that he needed to cry. But faith is uppermost now, and the very terror feeds it. So, by swift transition, our fears may pass into their own opposite and become courageous trust. Just as in a coal fire the thick black smoke sometimes gets alight and passes into ruddy flame, so our fears may catch fire and flash up as confidence and prayer.

Note the merciful swiftness of Christ's answer. 'Immediately He caught him,' because another moment would have been too late. There will be time to teach him the lessons of his presumption, but when the water is all but up to the lips that shrieked for help, there is

but one thing to do. He must be saved first and talked to afterwards. Our cries for deliverance in temporal matters are not always answered so quickly, for it is often better for us to be left to struggle with the waves and winds. But our appeals for Christ's helping hand in soul-peril are always answered without delay. No appreciable time is consumed in the passage of the telegram or in flashing back the answer. The apostle was not caught by Christ's hand before he knew his danger, for it was good for him that he should go down some way, but he was caught as soon as he called on the Master, and before he had come to any harm. The trial lasted long enough to wash the stiffening of self-confidence out of him, and then it had done its work—and Christ's strong hand held him up.

The manner of the answer is noteworthy. It is determined by, and adapted to, his weak faith. He could not be upheld now as he had been a moment ago, before his fear had weighted him, by the exercise of Christ's will only. Then Christ could hold him up without touching him, but now the palpable grasp of the hand was needed to assure the tremulous, doubting heart. So we, too, sometimes need and get material and outward signs which make it easier to feel the reality of sustaining grace. But whether we do or no, Christ's swift help always takes the form best suited to our faith, and He has regard to the capacity of our clasping hands in the measure and manner of His gifts.

The time and tone of Christ's gentle remonstrance are remarkable. Deliverance comes first, and rebuke afterwards. Having first shown him, by the fact of safety, that his doubts were irrational, Christ then, and not till then, puts His gentle question. Perhaps

there was a smile on His face, as surely there was love in His voice, that softened the rebuke and went to Peter's heart.

What does Christ rebuke him for? Getting out of the boat? No. He does not blame him for venturing too much, but for trusting too little. He does not blame him for attempting something beyond his strength, but for not holding fast the beginning of his confidence firm unto the end. And so the lesson for us is, that we cannot expect too much if we expect it perseveringly. We cannot set our conceptions of Christ's possible help to us too high if only we keep at the height to which we once have set them, and are assured that He will hold us up when we are down amongst the weltering waves, as we fancied ourselves to be when we were sitting in the boat wishing to be with Him. That is the question that He will meet us with when we get up on the shore yonder; and we shall not have any more to say for ourselves, in vindication of our tremulous trust, than Peter, silenced for once, had to say on this occasion.

It will be good for us all if, like this apostle, our trials consolidate our characters, and out of the shifting, fluctuating, impetuous nature that was blown about like sand by every gust of emotion there be made, by the pressure of responsibility and trial, and experience of our own unreliableness, the 'Rock' of a stable character, steadfast and unmovable, with calm resolution and fixed faith, on which the Great Architect can build some portion of His great temple.

THE CRUMBS AND THE BREAD

'Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. 22. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. 23. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. 24. But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 25. Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. 26. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. 27. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. 28. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. 29. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. 30. And great multitudes came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and He healed them: 31. Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.'—*MATT. xv. 21-31.*

THE King of Israel has passed beyond the bounds of Israel, driven by the hostility of those who should have been His subjects. The delegates of the priestly party from Jerusalem, who had come down to see into this dangerous enthusiasm which was beginning in Galilee, have made Christ's withdrawal expedient, and He goes northward, if not actually into the territory of Tyre and Sidon, at any rate to the border land. The incident of the Syro-Phœnician woman becomes more striking if we suppose that it took place on Gentile ground. At all events, after it, we learn from Mark that He made a considerable circuit, first north and then east, and so came round to the eastern side of the sea of Galilee, where the last paragraph of this section finds Him. The key to its meaning lies in the contrast between the single cure of the woman's demoniac daughter, obtained after so long imploring, and the spontaneous abundance of the cures wrought when Jesus again had Jewish sufferers to do with, even though it were on the half-Gentilised eastern shore of the lake. The contrast is

an illustration of His parable of the crumbs that fell from the table and the plentiful feast that was spread upon it for the children.

The story of the Syro-Phœnician woman naturally falls into four parts, each marked by the recurrence of 'He answered.'

I. There is the piteous cry, and the answer of silence. Mark tells us that Jesus sought concealment in this journey; but distress has quick eyes, and this poor woman found Him. Canaanite as she is, and thus a descendant of the ancient race of Israel's enemies, she has learned to call Him the Son of David, owning His kingship, which His born subjects disowned. She beseeches for that which He delights to give, identifying herself with her poor child's suffering, and asking as for herself His mercy. As Chrysostom says: 'It was a sight to stir pity to behold a woman calling aloud in such distress, and that woman a mother, and pleading for a daughter, and that daughter in such evil plight.' In her humility she does not bring her child, nor ask Him to go to her. In her agony, she has nothing to say but to spread her grief before Him, as thinking that He, of whose pity she has heard, needs but to know in order to alleviate, and requires no motives urged to induce Him to help. In her faith, she thinks that His power can heal from afar. What more could He have desired? All the more startling, then, is His demeanour. All the conditions which He usually required, were present in her; but He, who was wont to meet these with swift and joyful over-answers, has no word to say to this poor, needy, persevering, humble, and faithful suppliant. The fountain seems frozen, from which such streams of blessing were wont to flow. His mercy seems clean gone, and His compassion to have

failed. A Christ silent to a sufferer's cry is a paradox which contradicts the whole gospel story, and which, we may be very sure, no evangelist would have painted, if he had not been painting from the life.

II. There is the disciples' intercession answered by Christ's statement of the limitations of His mission. Their petition evidently meant, 'Dismiss her by granting her request'; they knew in what fashion He was wont to 'send away' such suppliants. They seem, then, more pitiful than He is. But their thoughts are more for themselves than for her. That 'us' shows the cloven foot. They did not like the noise, and they feared it might defeat His purpose of secrecy; and so, by their phrase, 'Send her away,' they unconsciously betray that what they wanted was not granting the prayer, but getting rid of the petitioner. Perhaps, too, they mean, 'Say something to her; either tell her that Thou wilt or that Thou wilt not; break Thy silence somehow.' No doubt, it was intensely disagreeable to have a shrieking woman coming after them; and they were only doing as most of us would have done, and as so many of us do, when we give help without one touch of compassion, in order to stop some imploring mouth.

Their apparently compassionate but really selfish intercession was put aside by the answer, which explains the paradox of His silence. It puts emphasis on two things: His subordination to the divine will of the Father, and the restrictions imposed thereby on the scope of His beneficent working. He was obeying the divine will in confining His ministry to the Jewish people as we know that He did. Clearly, that restriction was necessary. It was a case of concentration in suffering. The fire must be gathered on the Gentiles afterward to warm the chamber. There

must be geographical and national limits to His life; and the Messiah, who comes last in the long series of the kings and prophets, can only be authenticated as the world's Messiah, by being first the fulfiller to the children of the promises made to the fathers. The same necessity, which required that revelation should be made through that nation, required that the climax and fulfiller of all revelation should limit His earthly ministry to it. This limitation must be regarded as applying only to His own personal ministry. It did not limit His sympathies, nor interfere with His consciousness of being the Saviour and King of the whole world. He had already spoken the parables which claimed it all for the area of the development of His kingdom, and in many other ways had given utterance to His consciousness of universal dominion, and His purpose of universal mercy. But He knew that there was an order of development in the kingdom, and that at its then stage the surest way to attain the ultimate universality was rigid limitation of it to the chosen people. This conviction locked His gracious lips against even this poor woman's piteous cry. We may well believe that His sympathy outran His commission, and that it would have been hard for so much love to be silent in the presence of so much sorrow, if He had not felt the solemn pressure of that divine necessity which ruled all His life. He was bound by His instructions, and therefore He answered her not a word. Individual suffering is no reason for transcending the limits of God-appointed functions; and he is absolved from the charge of indifference who refrains from giving help, which he can only give by overleaping the bounds of his activity, which have been set by the Father.

III. We have, next, the persistent suppliant answered

by a refusal which sounds harsh and hopeless. Christ's former words were probably not heard by the woman, who seems to have been behind the group. She saw that something was being said to Him, and may have gathered, from gestures or looks, that His reply was unfavourable. Perhaps there was a short pause in their walk, while they spoke, during which she came nearer. Now she falls at His feet, and with 'beautiful shamelessness,' as Chrysostom calls it, repeats her prayer, but this time with pathetic brevity, uttering but the one cry, 'Lord, help me!' The intenser the feeling, the fewer the words. Heart-prayers are short prayers. She does not now invoke Him as the Son of David, nor tell her sorrow over again, but flings herself in desperation on His pity, with the artless and unsupported cry, wrung from her agony, as she sees the hope of help fading away. Like Jacob, in his mysterious struggle, 'she wept, and made supplication unto Him.'

As it would seem, her distress touched no chord of sympathy; and from the lips accustomed to drop oil and wine into every wound, came words like swords, cold, unfeeling, keen-edged, fitted and meant to lacerate. We shall not understand them, or Him, if we content ourselves with the explanation which jealousy for His honour as compassionate and tender has led many to adopt, that He meant all the long delay in granting her request, and the words which He spoke, only as tests of her faith. His refusal was a real refusal, founded on the divine decree, which He was bound to obey. His words to her, harsh as they unquestionably sound, are but another way of putting the limitation on which He had just insisted in His answer to the disciples. The 'bread' is the blessing which He, as the sent of

God, brings; the 'children' are the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel'; the 'dogs' are the Gentile world. The meaning of the whole is simply the necessary restriction of His personal activity to the chosen nation. It is not meant to wound nor to insult, though, no doubt, it is cast in a form which might have been offensive, and would have repelled a less determined or less sorrowful heart. The form may be partly explained by the intention of trying her earnestness, which, though it is not the sole, or even the principal, is a subordinate, reason of our Lord's action. But it is also to be considered in the light of the woman's quick-witted retort, which drew out of it an inference which we cannot suppose that Christ did not intend. He uses a diminutive for 'dogs,' which shows that He is not thinking of the fierce, unclean animals, masterless and starving, that still haunt Eastern cities, and deserve their bad character, but of domestic pets, who live with the household, and are near the table. In fact, the woman seized His intention much better than later critics who find 'national scorn' in the words; and the fair inference from them is just that which she drew, and which constituted the law of the preaching of the Gospel,—'To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.'

IV. We have the woman's retort, which wrings hope out of apparent discouragement, answered by Christ's joyful granting of her request. Out of His very words she weaves a plea. 'Yes, Lord; I am one of the dogs; then I am not an alien, but belong to the household.' The Revised Version does justice to her words by reading 'for even' instead of 'yet.' She does not enter a caveat against the analogy, but accepts it wholly, and only asks Him to carry out His own metaphor. She takes the sword from His hand, or, as Luther says, 'she

catches Him in His own words.' She does not ask a place at the table, nor anything taken from those who have a prior claim to a more abundant share in His mercies. A crumb is enough for her, which they will never miss. In other and colder words, she acquiesces in the divine appointment which limits His mission to Israel; but she recognises that all nations belong to God's household, and that she and her countrymen have a real, though for the time inferior, position in it. She pleads that her gain will not be the children's loss, nor the answer to her prayers an infraction of the spirit of His mission. Perhaps, too, there may be a reference to the fact of His being there on Gentile soil, in her words, 'Which fall from the children's table.' She does not want the bread to be thrown from the table to her. She is not asking Him to transfer His ministry to Gentiles; but here He is. A crumb has fallen, in His brief visit. May she not eat of that? In this answer faith, humility, perseverance, swift perception of His meaning, and hallowed ingenuity and boldness, are equally admirable. By admitting that she was 'a dog,' and pleading her claim on that footing, she shows that she was 'a child.' And therefore, because she has shown herself one of the true household, in the fixedness of her faith, in the meekness of her humility, in the persistence of her prayers, Christ joyfully recognises that here is a case in which He may pass the line of ordinary limitation, and that, in doing so, He does not exceed His commission. Such faith is entitled to the fullest share of His gift. She takes her place beside the Gentile centurion as the two recipients of commendation from Him for the greatness of their faith. It had seemed as if He would give nothing; but He ends with giving all, putting the key of the store-

house into her hand, and bidding her take, not a crumb, but 'as thou wilt.' Her daughter is healed, by His power working at a distance; but that was not, we may be very sure, the last nor the best of the blessings which she took from that great treasure of which He made her mistress. Nor can we doubt that He rejoiced at the removal of the barrier which dammed back His help, as much as she did at the abundance of the stream which reached her at last.

V. The final verses of our lesson give us a striking contrast to this story. Jesus is again on the shores of the lake, after a tour through the Tyrian and Sidonian territory, and then eastwards and southwards, to its eastern bank. There He, as on several former occasions, seeks seclusion and repose in the hills, which is broken in upon by the crowds. The old excitement and rush of people begin again. And large numbers of sick, 'lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others,' are brought. They are cast 'down at His feet' in hot haste, with small ceremony, and, as would appear, with little petitioning for His healing power. But the same grace, for which the Canaanitish woman had needed to plead so hard, now seems to flow almost unasked. She had, as it were, wrung a drop out; now it gushes abundantly. She had not got her 'crumb' without much pleading; these get the bread almost without asking. It is this contrast of scant and full supplies which the evangelist would have us observe. And he points his meaning plainly enough by that expression, 'they glorified the God of Israel,' which seems to be Matthew's own, and not his quotation of what the crowd said. This abundance of miracle witnesses to the pre-eminence of Israel over the Gentile nations, and to the special revelation of Himself which God

made to them in His Son. The crowd may have found in it only fuel for narrow national pride and contempt; but it was the divine method for the founding of the kingdom none the less; and these two scenes, set thus side by side, teach the same truth, that the King of men is first the King of Israel.

THE DIVINE CHRIST CONFESSED, THE SUFFERING CHRIST DENIED

'When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? 14. And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. 18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20. Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ. 21. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee. 23. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. 24. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. 26. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 27. For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works. 28. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.'—MATT. xvi. 13-28.

THIS section is embarrassing from its fulness of material. We can but lightly touch points on which volumes might be, and indeed have been, written.

I. The first section (vs. 13-20) gives us Peter's great confession in the name of the disciples, and Christ's answer to it. The centre of this section is the eager avowal of the impetuous apostle, always foremost

for good or evil. We note the preparation for it, its contents, and its results. As to the preparation,—our Lord is entering on a new era in His work, and desires to bring clearly into His followers' consciousness the sum of His past self-revelation. The excitement, which He had checked after the first miraculous feeding, had died down. The fickle crowd had gone away from Him, and the shadows of the cross were darkening. Amid the seclusion of the woods, fountains, and rocks of Cæsarea, far away from distracting influences, He puts these two momentous questions. Following the Revised Version reading, we have a double contrast between the first and second. 'Men' answers to 'ye,' and 'the Son of Man' to 'I.' The first question is as to the partial and conflicting opinions among the multitudes who had heard His name for Himself from His own lips; the second, in its use of the 'I,' hints at the fuller unveiling of the depths of His gracious personality, which the disciples had experienced, and implies, 'Surely you, who have been beside Me, and known Me so closely, have reached a deeper understanding.' It has a tone of the same wistfulness and wonder as that other question of His, 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?' For their sakes, He seeks to draw out their partly unconscious faith, that had been smouldering, fed by their daily experience of His beauty and tenderness. Half-recognised convictions float in many a heart, which need but a pointed question to crystallise into master-truths, to which, henceforward, the whole being is subject. Great are the dangers of articulate creeds; but great is the power of putting our shadowy beliefs into plain words. 'With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.'

Why should this great question have been preceded by the other? Probably to make the disciples feel more distinctly the chaotic contradictions of the popular judgment, and their own isolation by their possession of the clearer light. He wishes them to see the gulf opening between them and their fellows, and so to bind them more closely to Himself. This is the question the answer to which settles everything for a man. It has an intensely sharp point. We cannot take refuge from it in the general opinion. Nor does any other man's judgment about Him matter one whit to us. This Christ has a strange power, after nineteen hundred years, of coming to each of us, with the same persistent interrogation on His lips. And to-day, as then, all depends on the answer which we give. Many answer by exalted estimates of Him, like these varying replies which ascribed to Him prophetic authority, but they have not understood His own name for Himself, nor drunk in the meaning of His self-revelation, unless they can reply with the full-toned confession of the apostle, which sets Him far above and apart from the highest and holiest.

As to the contents of the confession, it includes both the human and the divine sides of Christ's nature. He is the Messiah, but He is more than what a Jew meant by that name; He is 'the Son of the living God,' by which we cannot indeed suppose that Peter meant all that he afterwards learned it contained, or all that the Church has now been taught of its meaning, but which, nevertheless, is not to be watered down as if it did not declare His unique filial relation to the Father, and so His divine nature. Nathanael had burst into rapturous adoration of Jesus as 'the Son of God' at the very beginning; and the disciples' glad confidence, which cast

out the fear of the dim form striding across the sea, had echoed the confession; all had heard His words, 'No man knoweth the Father but the Son.' So we need not hesitate to interpret this confession as in essence and germ containing the whole future doctrine of our Lord's divinity. True, the speaker did not know all which lay in His words. Do we? Do we not see here an illustration of the method of Christian progress in doctrine, which consists not in the winning of new truths, but in the penetrating further into the meaning of old and initial truths? The conviction which made and makes a Christian, is this of Peter's; and Christian growth is into, not away from, it.

As to the results, they are set forth in our Lord's answer, which breathes of delight, and we may almost say gratitude. His manhood knew the thrill of satisfaction at having some hearts which understood though partially, and loved even better than they knew. The solemn address to the apostle by his ancestral name, gives emphasis to the contrast between his natural weakness and his divine illumination and consequent privilege. The name of Peter is not here bestowed, but interpreted. Christ does not say 'Thou shalt be,' but 'Thou art,' and so presupposes the former conferring of the name. Unquestionably, the apostle is the rock on which the Church is built. The efforts to avoid that conclusion would never have been heard of, but for the Roman Catholic controversy; but they are as unnecessary as unsuccessful. Is it credible that in the course of an address which is wholly occupied with conferring prerogatives on the apostle, a clause should come in, which is concerned about an altogether different subject from the 'thou' of the preceding and the 'thee' of the following clauses, and which yet

should take the very name of the apostle, slightly modified, for that other subject? We do not interpret other books in that fashion. But it was not the 'flesh and blood' Peter, but Peter as the recipient and faithful utterer of the divine inspiration in his confession, who received these privileges. Therefore they are not his exclusive property, but belong to his faith, which grasped and confessed the divine-human Lord; and wherever that faith is, there are these gifts, which are its results. They are the 'natural' consequences of the true faith in Christ, in that higher region where the supernatural is the natural. Peter's grasp of Christ's nature wrought upon his character, as pressure does upon sand, and solidified his shifting impetuosity into rock-like firmness. So the same faith will tend to do in any man. It made him the chief instrument in the establishment of the early Church. On souls steadied and made solid by like faith, and only on such, can Christ build His Church. Of course, the metaphor here regards Jesus, not as the foundation, as the Scripture generally does, but as the founder. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on the foundations of the heavenly city; and, in historical fact, the name of this apostle is graven on the deepest and first laid. In like subordinate sense, all who share that heroic faith and proclaim it are used by the Master-builder in the foundations of His Church; and Peter himself is eager to share his name among his brethren, when he says 'Ye also, as living stones.'

Built on men who hold by that confession, the Church is immortal; and the armies who pour out of the gates of the pale kingdoms of the unseen world shall not be able to destroy it. Peter, as confessor of his Lord's human-divine nature, wields the keys of the kingdom

of heaven, like a steward of a great house; and that too was fulfilled in his apostolic activity in his admitting Jews at Pentecost, and Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. But the same power attends all who share his faith and avowal, for the preaching of that faith is the opening of heaven's door to men. He receives the power of binding and loosing, by which is not meant that of forgiving or retaining sins, but that of prohibiting or allowing actions, or, in other words, of laying down the law of Christian conduct. This meaning of the metaphors is made certain by the common Jewish use of them. Despotie legislative power is not here committed to the apostle, but the great principle is taught that the morality of Christianity flows directly from its theology, and that whosoever, like Peter, grasps firmly the cardinal truth of Christ's nature, and all which flows therefrom, will have his insight so cleared that his judgments on what is permitted or forbidden to a Christian man will correspond with the decisions of heaven, in the measure of his hold upon the truth which underlies all religion and all morality, namely, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' These are gifts to Peter indeed, but only as possessor of that faith, and are much more truly understood as belonging to all who 'possess like precious faith' (as Peter says), than as the prerogative of any individual or class.

II. The second section (vs. 21-23) contains the startling new revelation of the suffering Messiah, and the disciples' repugnance to it. The Gospel has two parts; Jesus is the Christ, and the Christ must suffer and enter into His glory. Our Lord has made sure that the disciples have learned the first before He leads to the second. The very conviction of His dignity and divine

nature made that second truth the more bewildering, but still the only road to it was through the first. Verse 21 covers an indefinite time, during which Jesus gradually taught His sufferings. Ordinarily we exaggerate the suddenness, and therefore the depth, of Peter's fall, by supposing that it took place immediately after his confession; but the narrative discountenances the idea, and merely says that Jesus then 'began' His new teaching. There had been veiled hints of it (such as John ii. 19, and Matt. ix. 15, xii. 40), but henceforward it assumed prominence, and was taught without veil. It was no new thought to Himself, forced on Him by the growing enmity of the nation. The cross always cast its shadow on His path. He was no enthusiast, beginning with the dream of winning a world to His side, and slowly and heroically making up His mind to die a martyr, but His purpose in being born was to minister and to die, a ransom for the many. We have not here to do with a growing consciousness, but simply with an increasing clearness of utterance. Note the detailed accuracy of His prevision, which points to Jerusalem as the scene, and to the rulers of the nation as the instruments, and to death as the climax, and to resurrection as the issue, of His sufferings; the clear setting forth of the divine necessity which, as it ruled all His life, ruled here also, and is expressed in that solemn 'must'; and the perfectly willing acceptance by Him of that necessity, implied in that 'go,' and certified by many another word of His. The necessity was no external compulsion, driving Him to an unwelcome sacrifice, but one imposed alike by filial obedience and by brotherly love. He *must* die because He *would* save.

How vividly the scene of Peter's rash rejection of

the teaching is described! The apostle, full of eager love, still, as of old, swift to speak, and driven by unexamined impulse, lays his hand on Christ, and draws Him a little apart, while he 'begins' to pour out words which show that he has forgotten his confession. 'Rebuke' must not be softened down into anything less vehement or more respectful. He knows better than Jesus what will happen. Perhaps his assurance 'that this shall never be' means 'We will fight first.' But he is not allowed to finish what he began; for the Master, whom he loved unwisely but well, turns His back on him, as in horror, and shows by the terrible severity of His rebuke how deeply moved He is. He repels the hint in almost the same words as He had used to the tempter in the wilderness, of whom that Peter, who had so lately been the recipient and proclaimer of a divine illumination, has become the mouthpiece. So possible is it to fall from sunny heights to doleful depths! So little can any divine inspiration be permanent, if the man turn away from it to think man's thoughts, and set his affections on the things which men desire! So certainly does minding these degrade to becoming an organ of Satan! The words are full of restrained emotion, which reveal how real a temptation Peter had flung in Christ's path. The rock has become a stone of stumbling; the man Jesus shrank from the cross with a natural and innocent shrinking, which never made His will tremulous, but was none the less real; and such words from loving lips did affect him. Let us note, on the whole, that the complete truth about Jesus Christ must include these two parts,—His divine nature and Messiahship, and His death on the cross; and that neither alone is the gospel, nor is he a disciple, such

as Christ desires, who does not cleave to both with mind and heart.

III. In verses 24-28, the law, which ruled the Master's life, is extended to the servants. They recoiled from the thought of His having to suffer. They had to learn that they must suffer too if they would be His. First, the condition of discipleship is set before them as being the fellowship of His suffering. 'If any man will' gives them the option of withdrawal. A new epoch is beginning, and they will have to enlist again, and to do so with open eyes. He will have no unwilling soldiers, nor any who have been beguiled into the ranks. No doubt, some went away, and walked no more with Him. The terms of service are clear. Discipleship means imitation, and imitation means self-crucifixion. At that time they would only partially understand what taking up their cross was, but they would apprehend that a martyred master must needs have for followers men ready to be martyrs too. But the requirement goes much deeper than this. There is no discipleship without self-denial, both in the easier form of starving passions and desires, and in the harder of yielding up the will, and letting His will supplant ours. Only so can we ever come after Him, and of such sacrifice of self the cross is the eminent example. We cannot think too much of it as the instrument of our reconciliation and forgiveness, but we may, and too often do, think too little of it as the pattern of our lives. When Jesus began to teach His death, He immediately presented it as His servants' example. Let us not forget that fact.

The ground of the law is next stated in verse 25. The desire to save life is the loss of life in the highest sense. If that desire guide us, then farewell to enthu-

siasm, courage, the martyr spirit, and all which makes man's life nobler than a beast's. He who is ruled mainly by the wish to keep a whole skin, loses the best part of what he is so anxious to keep. In a wider application, regard for self as a ruling motive is destruction, and selfishness is suicide. On the other hand, lives hazarded for Christ are therein truly saved, and if they be not only hazarded, but actually lost, such loss is gain; and the same law, by which the Master 'must' die and rise again, will work in the servant. Verse 26 urges the wisdom of such apparent folly, and enforces the requirement by the plain consideration that 'life' is worth more than anything beside, and that on the two grounds, that the world itself would be of no use to a dead man, and that, once lost, 'life' cannot be bought back. Therefore the dictate of the wisest prudence is that seemingly prodigal flinging away of the lower 'life' which puts us in possession of the higher. Note that the appeal is here made to a reasonable regard to personal advantage, and *that* in the very act of urging to crucify self. So little did Christ think, as some people do, that the desire to save one's soul is selfishness.

Verse 27 confirms all the preceding by the solemn announcement of the coming of the Son of Man as Judge. Mark the dignity of the words. He is to come 'in the glory of the Father.' That ineffable and inaccessible light which rays forth from the Father enwraps the Son. Their glory is one. The waiting angels are 'His.' He renders to every man according to his doing (his actions considered as one whole). Thus He claims for Himself universal sway, and the power of accurately determining the whole moral character of every life, as well as that of awarding

precisely graduated retribution. They surely shall then find their lives who have followed Him here.

Verse 28 adds, with His solemn 'verily,' a confirmation of this announcement of His coming to judge. The question of what event is referred to may best be answered by noting that it must be one sufficiently far off from the moment of speaking to allow of the death of the greater number of His hearers, and sufficiently near to allow of the survival of some; that it must also be an event, after which these survivors would go the common road into the grave; that it is apparently distinguished from His coming 'in the glory of the Father,' and yet is of such a nature as to afford convincing proof of the establishment of His kingdom on earth, and to be, in some sort, a sign of that final act of judgment. All these requirements (and they are all the fair inferences from the words) meet only in the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the national life of the chosen people. That was a crash of which we faintly realise the tremendous significance. It swept away the last remnant of the hope that Israel was to be the kingdom of the Messiah; and from out of the dust and chaos of that fall the Christian Church emerged, manifestly destined for world-wide extension. It was a 'great and terrible day of the Lord,' and, as such, was a precursor and a prophecy of the day of the Lord, when He 'shall come in the glory of the Father,' and 'render unto every man according to his deeds.'

CHRIST FORESEEING THE CROSS

'From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.'—MATT. xvi. 21.

THE 'time' referred to in the text was probably a little more than six months before the Crucifixion, when Jesus was just on the point of finally leaving Galilee, and travelling towards Jerusalem. It was an epoch in His ministry. The hostility of the priestly party in the capital had become more pronounced, and simultaneously the fickle enthusiasm of the Galilean crowds, which had been cooled by His discouragement, had died down into apathy. He and His followers are about to leave familiar scenes and faces, and to plunge into perilous and untrodden paths. He is resolved that, if they will 'come after Him,' as He bids them in a subsequent verse, it shall be with their eyes open, and as knowing that to come after Him now means to cut themselves loose from old moorings, and to put out into the storm. They shall be abundantly certified that their journeying to Jerusalem is not a triumphal procession to a crown, but a march to a cross.

So, this new epoch in His life is attended with a new development of His teaching. My text sums up the result of many interviews in which, by slow degrees, He sought to put the disciples in possession of this unwelcome truth. It was prepared for, by the previous conversation in which His question elicited from Peter, as the mouthpiece of the apostles, the great confession of His Messiahship and Divinity. Settled in their belief of these truths, however imperfect their intellectual grasp of them, they might

perhaps be able to receive the mournful mystery of His passion.

I. We have here set forth in the first place our Lord's anticipation of the Cross.

Mark the tone of the language, the minuteness of the detail, the absolute certainty of the prevision. That is not the language of a man who simply is calculating that the course which he is pursuing is likely to end in his martyrdom; but the thing lies there before Him, a definite, fixed certainty; every detail known, the scene, the instruments, the non-participation of these in the final act of His death, His resurrection, and its date,—all manifested and mapped out in His sight, and all absolutely certain.

Now this was by no means the first time that the certainty of the Cross was plain to Christ. It was not even the first time that it had been announced in His teaching. Veiled hints; allusions, brief but pregnant, had been scattered through His earlier ministry—such, for instance, as the enigmatical word at its very beginning, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up'; or as the profound word to the rabbi that sought Him by night, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up'; or as the passing hint, dropped to the people, in symbolical language, about the 'sign of the prophet Jonas'; or as the grief foreshadowed dimly to the apostles, of the withdrawal of the Bridegroom, and their 'fasting in those days.' These hints, and no doubt others unrecorded, had cropped to the surface before; and what we have to do with here, is neither the dawning of an expectation in Christ, nor the first utterance of the certainty of the Cross, but simply the beginning of a continuous and unenigmatical teach-

ing of it, as an element in His instructions to His disciples.

So then, we have to recognise the fact that our Lord's prevision of the end—shone, I was going to say, perhaps it might be truer to say, darkened,—all the path along which He had to travel.

I think that people dogmatise a great deal too glibly as to what they know very little about, the interaction of the divine and the human elements in Christ, and on the one side are far too certain in their affirmation that His humanity possessed in some reflected fashion the divine gift of omniscience; and on the other hand, that His manhood, passing through the process of human development, and increasing in wisdom, was necessarily in its earlier stages void of the consciousness of His Messianic mission. I dare not affirm either 'yes' or 'no' about that matter; but this I am sure of, that if ever there was a time in the development of the Manhood of Jesus Christ when He began to know Himself as the Messiah, at that same time He began to be certain of the Cross. For His Messianic work required the Cross, and the divine thing that was in Him was born into the world for a double purpose, to minister and to die.

So, dear friends, putting aside mere metaphysics, which are superficial after all, we have to recognise this as the fact, that all through His career there arose before our Lord the certainty of that death, and that it did not assume to Him the aspect which such a prospect might have assumed to others as a possible result of a mission that failed, but it assumed to Him the aspect of the certain result of a work that was accomplished. He began His career with no illusions, such as other teachers, reformers, philanthropists, men that

have moved society, have always begun with. Moses might 'suppose his brethren would have understood how that God by His hand would deliver them,' but Christ had no such illusion. He knew from the beginning that He came to be rejected and to die. And so He 'trod life's common way,' with that grim certainty rising ever before Him. I suppose that He did not, as you and I do, forget the death that awaits us, and find the non-remembrance of it the condition of much of our energy, but that it was perpetually in His sight.

Now I do not think that we sufficiently dwell upon that fact as an element in the human experience of our Lord. What beauty it gives to His gentleness, to the leisureliness of heart with which He was ready to make everybody's sorrow His own, and to lay a healing and a loving finger upon every wound! With this certainty before Him, there was yet no strain manifest upon His spirit, no self-absorption, no shutting Himself out from other people's burdens because He had so heavy ones of His own to carry; but He was ready for every joy, ready for all sympathy, ready for every help; and if we cannot say that, 'in cheerful godliness,' as I think we may, at least we can say that with solemn joy and untroubled readiness, He journeyed towards that Cross. This Isaac was under no illusions as to who the Lamb for the offering was, but knowing it, He patiently carried the wood and climbed the hill, ready for the Father's will.

II. That brings me to notice the second point here, our Lord's recognition of the necessity of His suffering.

Mark that He does not say that He *shall* suffer. Certainty is not all that He proclaims here, however absolute that certainty might be, but it is '*He must.*' He is speaking not only of the historical fact, but of

the need, deep in the nature of things, for His sufferings that were to follow.

And though these were wrought out by His own willing submission on the one hand, and by the unfettered play of the evil passions of the worst of men on the other, yet over all that apparent chaos of unbridled devildom there ruled the unalterable purpose of God; and the 'must' was wrought out through the passions of evil-doers and the voluntary submission of the innocent sufferer; thus setting before us, in the central fact of the history of humanity, viz. the Cross and passion of Jesus Christ, the eminent example of that great mystery how the absolute freedom of the human will, and the responsibility of the guilt of human wrong-doers, are congruous with the fixed purpose of an all-determining and all-ruling Providence.

But that is apart from my purpose. Mark then, that our Lord's recognition of this necessity for His suffering is, on the first and plainest aspect of it, His recognition that His suffering was necessary on the ground of filial obedience. All through His life we hear that 'must' echoing, and His whole spirit bowed to it. As He says Himself, 'The Son can do nothing of Himself.' As was said for Him of old: 'Lo, I come. In the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, and Thy law is within My heart.' So the Father's will is the Son's law; and the Father's 'Thou shalt' is answered by the Son's 'I must.'

But yet that necessity grounded on filial obedience was no mere external necessity determined solely by the divine will. God so willed it, because it must be so; that it must be so was not because God so willed it. That is to say, the work to which Christ had set His

hand was a work that demanded the Cross, nor could it be accomplished without it. For it was the work of redeeming the world, and required more than a beautiful life, more than a divine gentleness of heart, more than the homely and yet deep wisdom of His teachings, it required the sacrifice that He offered on the Cross.

So, dear friends, Christ's 'must' is but this: 'My work is not accomplished except I die.' And remember that the connection between our Lord's work and our Lord's death is not that which subsists between the works and the deaths of great teachers, or heroic martyrs, or philanthropists and benefactors, who will gladly pay the price of life in order to carry out their loving or their wise designs. It is no mere appendage to His work, nor the price that He paid for having done it, but it is His very work in its vital centre.

I pray you to consider if there is any theory of the meaning and power of the death of Jesus Christ which adequately explains this 'must,' except the one that He died a sacrifice for the sins of the world. On any other hypothesis, as it seems to me, of what His death meant, it is surplusage, over and above His work: not adding much, either to His teaching or to the beauty of His example, and having no absolute stringent necessity impressed upon it. There is one doctrine—that when He died He bare the sins of the whole world—which makes His death a necessity; and I ask you, Is there any other doctrine which does? Take care of a Christianity which would not be much impoverished if the Cross were struck out of it altogether.

There is a deeper question, on which, as I believe, it does not become us to enter, and that is, What is the

necessity for the necessity? Why *must* it be that He, who is the Redeemer of the world, must needs be the Sacrifice for the world? We do not know enough about the depths of the divine nature and the divine government to speak very wisely or reverently upon that subject, and I, for one, abjure the attempt, which seems to me to be presumptuous—the attempt to explain why there was needed a sacrifice for sin in order to the forgiveness of sin. If I knew all about God, I could tell you; and nobody, that does not, can. But we can see, as far as concerns us, that, as the history of all religions tells us, for the forgiveness and acceptance of sinful men a pure sacrifice is needed; and that for teaching us the love of God, the hideousness and wages of sin, for our emancipation from evil, for the quieting of our consciences, for a foothold for faith, for an adequate motive of self-surrender and obedience, his sacrificial death is needful. The life and death of Jesus Christ, regarded as God's sacrifice for the world's sin, *does* all this. The life and death of Jesus Christ, regarded in any other aspect, does not do this. Historically speaking, mutilated forms of Christianity, which have not known what to do with the Cross of Christ, have lost their constraining, purifying, and aggressive power. For us sinful men, if we are to be delivered from evil and become sons of God, He *must* suffer many things, and be killed, and rise again the third day.

III. Now note further, how we have here also our Lord's willing acceptance of the necessity.

It is one thing to recognise, and another thing to accept, a needs-be. This 'must' was no unwelcome obligation laid upon Him against His will, but one to which His whole nature responded and which He

accepted. No doubt there was in Him the innocent instinctive physical shrinking from death. No doubt the Cross, in so far, was pain and suffering. No doubt we are to trace the reality of a temptation in Peter's rash words which follow, as indicated to us by the severity and almost vehemence of the action with which Christ puts it away. No doubt there is a profound meaning in that answer of His, 'Thou art a *stumbling-block* to Me.' The 'Rock' is turned into a stone of stumbling, and Peter's suggestion appeals to something in Him which responded to it.

That shrinking might be a shrinking of nature, but it was not a recoil of will. The ship may toss in dreadful billows, but the needle points to the pole. The train may rock upon the line, but it never leaves the rails. Christ felt that the Cross was an evil, but that feeling never made Him falter in His determination to bear it. His willing acceptance of the necessity was owing to His full resolve to save the world. He must die because He would redeem, and He would redeem because He could not but love. 'He saved others,' and therefore 'Himself He cannot save.' So the 'must' was not an iron chain that fastened Him to His Cross. Like some of the heroic martyrs of old, who refused to be bound to the funeral pile, He stood there chained to it by nothing but His own will and loving purpose to save the world.

And, brethren, in that loving purpose, each of us may be sure that we had an individual and a personal share. Whatever the interaction between the divinity and the humanity, this at all events is certain, that every soul of man has his distinct and definite place in Christ's knowledge and in Christ's love. Each of us all may be sure that one strand of the cords of love which

fastened Him to the Cross was His love for me; and each of us may say—He must die, because ‘He loved me, and gave Himself for me.’

IV. Lastly, notice here our Lord’s teaching the necessity of His death.

This announcement was preceded, as I remarked, by that conversation which led to the crystallising of the half-formed convictions of the apostles in a definite creed, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ But that was not all that they needed to know and believe and trust to. That was the first volume of their lesson-book. The second volume was this, that ‘Christ must suffer.’ And so let us learn the central place which the Cross holds in Christ’s teaching. They tell us that the doctrine of Christ as the Sacrifice for the world is not in the Gospels. Where are the eyes that read the Gospels and do not see it? The theory of it is not there; the announcements of it are. And in this latest section of our Lord’s ministry, they are fuller and more frequent than in the earlier, for the plain reason which is implied by the preparation through which He passed these disciples, ere He ventured to communicate the mournful and the bewildering fact. There must be, first, the grasp of His Messiahship, and some recognition that He is the Son of God, ere it is possible to go on to speak of the Cross, the full message concerning which could not be spoken until after the Resurrection and the Ascension.

But note, you do not understand Christ’s Cross unless you bring to it the faith in Christ’s Messiahship and the belief in some measure that He is the Son of God. Neither the pathos nor the power of His death is intelligible if it be simply like other deaths—the

dying of a man who is born subject to the law of mortality, and who yields to it by natural process. Unless you and I take upon our lips, though with far deeper meaning, the words with which the heathen centurion gazed upon the dying Christ, and say, 'Truly this was the Son of God!' His Cross is common and trivial and insignificant; but if we can thus speak, then it stands before us as the crown of all God's manifestations in the world, 'the wisdom of God and the power of God.'

And then note, still further, how, without the Cross, these other truths are not the whole gospel. There were disciples then, as there have been disciples since, and as there are to-day, who were willing to accept, 'Thou art the Christ'; and willing in some sense to say 'Thou art the Son of God,' but stumbled when He said, 'The Son of Man must suffer.' Brethren, I venture to urge that the gospel of the Incarnation, precious as it is, is not the whole gospel, and that the full-orbed truth about Jesus Christ is that He is the Christ, and that He died for our sins, and rose again to live for ever, our Priest and King.

We need a whole Christ. For our soul's salvation, for the quieting of our consciences, the forgiveness of our sins, for new life, for peace, purity, obedience, love, joy, hope, our faith must grasp 'Christ, and Him crucified.' A half Christ is no Christ, and unless we have as sinful men laid hold of the one Sacrifice for sins for ever, which He offered, we do not understand even the preciousness of the half Christ whom we perceive, nor know the full beauty of His example, the depth of His teaching, nor the tenderness of His heart.

I beseech you, ask yourselves, *What* Christ can do for me the things which I need to have done, except

‘the Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us’?

THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY

‘And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart. 2. And was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. 3. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him. 4. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. 5. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him. 6. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. 7. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. 8. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. 9. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead. 10. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? 11. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. 12. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them. 13. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist.’—MATT. xvii. 1-13.

THE early guess at Tabor as the scene of the Transfiguration must be given up as untenable. Some one of the many peaks of Hermon rising right over Cæsarea is a far more likely place. But the silence of all the accounts as to the locality surely teaches us the unimportance of knowledge on the point. The dangers of knowing would more than outweigh the advantages. A similar indefiniteness attaches to the *when*. Are we to think of it as occurring by night, or by day? Perhaps the former is slightly the more probable, from the fact of the descent being made ‘the next day’ (Luke). Our conception of the scene will be very different, as we think of that lustre from His face, and that bright cloud, as outshining the blaze of a Syrian sun, or as filling the night with glory. But we cannot settle which view is correct.

There are three distinct parts in the whole incident: the Transfiguration proper; the appearance of Moses and Elijah; and the cloud with the voice from it.

I. The Transfiguration proper.

The general statement that Jesus 'was transfigured before them' is immediately followed out into explanatory details. These are twofold—the radiance of His face, and the gleaming whiteness of His raiment, which shone like the snow on Hermon when it is smitten by the sunshine. Probably we are to think of the whole body as giving forth the same mysterious light, which made itself visible even through the white robe He wore. This would give beautiful accuracy and appropriateness to the distinction drawn in the two metaphors,—that His face was 'as the sun,' in which the undiluted glory was seen; and His garments 'as the light,' which is sunshine diffused and weakened. There is no hint of any external source of the brightness. It does not seem to have been a reflection from the visible symbol of the divine presence, as was the fading radiance on the face of Moses. That symbol does not come into view till the last stage of the incident. We are then to think of the brightness as rising from within, not cast from without. We cannot tell whether it was voluntary or involuntary. Luke gives a pregnant hint, in connecting it with Christ's praying, as if the calm ecstasy of communion with the Father brought to the surface the hidden glory of the Son. Can it be that such glory always accompanied His prayers, and that its presence may have been one reason for the sedulous privacy of these, except on this one occasion, when He desired that His faithful three should be 'eye-witnesses of His majesty'? However that may be, we have probably

to regard the Transfiguration as the transient making visible, in the natural, symbolic form of light, of the indwelling divine glory, which dwelt in Him as in a shrine, and then shone through the veil of His flesh. John explains the event, though His words go far beyond it, when he says, 'We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.'

What was the purpose of the Transfiguration? Matthew seems to tell us in that 'before them.' It was for their sakes, not for His, as indeed follows from the belief that it was the irradiation from within of the indwelling light. The new epoch of His life, in which they were to have a share of trial and cross-bearing, needed some great encouragement poured into their tremulous hearts; and so, for once, He deigned to let them look on His face shining as the sun, for a remembrance when they saw it covered with 'shame and spitting' and His brow bleeding from the thorns. But perhaps we may venture a step farther, and see here some prophecy of that body of His glory in which He now reigns. Speculations as to the difference between the earthly body of our Lord and ours are fascinating but unsubstantial. It was a true human body, susceptible of hunger, pain, weariness; but we are not taught that it carried in it the necessity of death. It may have been more pliable to the spirit's behests, and more transparent to its light, than ours. There may have been in that hour of radiance some approximation to the perfect harmony between the perfect spirit and the body, which is its fit organ, which we know is His now, and to which we also know that He will conform the body of our humiliation. Then His face 'shone as the sun'; when one of these three saw Him in His glory, 'His coun-

tenance was as the sun shineth in his strength'; and His own promise to us is that we too 'shall shine forth as the sun.' Then His garments were white as the light; His promise is that they who are worthy shall 'walk with Him in white.' The Transfiguration was a revelation and a prophecy.

II. The appearance of Moses and Elijah.

While the three are gazing with dazzled eyes, suddenly, as if shaped out of air, there stand by Jesus two mighty forms, evidently men, and yet, according to Luke, encompassed in the white radiance, walking with the Son of Man in a better furnace. What a stound of awe and wonder must have touched the gazers as the conviction who these were filled their minds, and they recognised, we know not how, the mighty lineaments of the lawgiver and the prophet! Did the three mortals understand the meaning of the words of the heavenly three? We cannot tell. Nor does Matthew tell us what was the theme of that wondrous colloquy. These two might have asked, 'Why hast Thou disquieted us to bring us up?' What is the answer? Wherefore were they there? To tell Jesus that He was to die? No, for that lay plain before Him. To learn from Him the mystery of His passion, that they might be His heralds, the one in Paradise, the other in the pale kingdoms of Hades? Perhaps, but, more probably, they came to minister to Him strength for His conflict, even as women did of their substance, and an angel did in Gethsemane. Perhaps the strength came to Jesus from seeing how they yearned for the fulfilment of the typified redemption; perhaps it came from His being able to speak to them as He could not to any on earth. At all events, surely Moses and Elijah were not brought there for their own

sakes alone, nor for the sake of the witnesses, but also for His sake who was prepared by that converse for His cross.

Further, their appearance set forth Christ's death, which was their theme, as the climax of revelation. The Law with its requirement and its sacrifices, and Prophecy with its forward-looking gaze, stand there, in their representatives, and bear witness that their converging lines meet in Jesus. The finger that wrote the law, and the finger that smote and parted Jordan, are each lifted to point to Him. The stern voices that spoke the commandments and that hurled threatenings at the unworthy occupants of David's throne, both proclaim, 'Behold the Lamb of God, the perfect Fulfiller of law, the true King of Israel.' Their presence and their speech were the acknowledgment that this was He whom they had seen from afar; their disappearance proclaims that their work is done when they have pointed to Him.

Their presence also teaches us that Jesus is the life of all the living dead. Of course, care must be exercised in drawing dogmatic conclusions from a manifestly abnormal incident, but some plain truths do result from it. Of these two, one had died, though mystery hung round his death and burial; the other had passed into the heavens by another gate than that of death; and here they both stand with lives undiminished by their mysterious changes, in fulness of power and of consciousness, bathed in glory, which was as their native air now. They are witnesses of an immortal life, and proofs that His yet unpierced hands held the keys of life and death. He opened the gate which moves backwards to no hand but His, and summoned them; and they come, with no napkins about their

heads, and no trailing grave-clothes entangling their feet, and own Him as the King of life.

They speak too of the eager onward gaze which the Old Testament believers turned to the coming Deliverer. In silent anticipation, through all these centuries, good men had lain down to die, saying, 'I wait for Thy salvation,' and after death their spirits had lived expectant and crying, like the souls under the altar, 'How long, O Lord, how long?' Now these two are brought from their hopeful repose, perchance to learn how near their deliverance was; and behind them we seem to discern a dim crowd of holy men and women, who had died in faith, not having received the promises, and who throng the portals of the unseen world, waiting for the near advent of the better Samson to bear away the gates to the city on the hill, and lead thither their ransomed train.

Peter's bewildered words need not long detain us. He is half dazed, but, true to his rash nature, thinks that he must say something, and that to do something will relieve the tension of his spirit. His proposal, so ridiculous as it is, shows that he had not really understood what he saw. It also expresses his feeling that it is much better to be there than to be travelling to a cross—and so may stand as an instance of a very real temptation for us all, that of avoiding unwelcome duties and shrinking from rough work, on the plea of holding sweet communion with Jesus on the mountain. It was *not* 'good' to stay there, and leave demoniacs uncured in the plain.

III. The cloud and the witnessing voice.

Peter's words receive no answer, for, while he is speaking, another solemn and silencing wonder has place. Suddenly a strange cloud forms in the cloudless

sky. It is 'bright' with no reflection caught from the sun; it is borne along by no wind; slowly it settles down upon them, like a roof, and, bright though it is, casts a strange shadow. According to one reading of Luke's account, Christ and the two heavenly witnesses pass within its folds, leaving the disciples without, and that separation seems confirmed by Matthew's saying that the voice 'came out of the cloud.' Our evangelist points to its brightness as singular. It was not merely bright, as if smitten by the sunlight, but its whole substance was luminous. It is almost a contradiction to speak of a cloud of light, and the anomalous expression points to something beyond nature. We cannot but remember the pillar which had a heart of fire, and glowed in the darkness over the sleeping camp, and the cloud which filled the house, and drove the priests from the sanctuary by its brightness. Nor should we forget that at His Ascension Jesus was not lost to sight in the blue; but while He was yet visible in the act of blessing, 'a cloud received Him out of their sight.' It is, in fact, the familiar symbol of the divine presence, which had long been absent from the temple, and now reappears. We may note the beauty and felicity of the emblem. It blends light and darkness, so suggesting how the very same 'attributes' of God are both; and how His revelation of Himself reveals Him as unrevealable. The manifestation of His power is also the 'hiding of His power.' The inaccessible light is also thick darkness. The same characteristics of His nature are light and joy to some, and blackness and woe to others.

We may note, too, Christ's passage into the cloud. Moses and Elijah, being purged from mortal weakness, could pass thither. But Jesus, alone of men, could pass

in the flesh into that brightness, and be hid in its fiery heart, unshrinking and unconsumed. 'Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' His entrance into it is but the witness to the purity of His nature, and the absence in Him of all fuel for fire. That bright cloud was 'His own calm home, His habitation from eternity,' and where no man, compassed with flesh and sin, could live, He enters as the Son into the bosom of the Father.

Then comes the articulate witness to the Son. The solemnity and force of the attestation are increased, if we conceive of the disciples as outside the cloud, and parted from Jesus. This word is meant for them only, and so is distinguished from the similar voice at the baptism, and has added the imperative 'Hear him.' The voice bears witness to the mystery of our Lord's person. It points to the contrast between His two attendants and Him. They are servants, 'this is the Son.' It sets forth His supernaturally born humanity, and, deeper still, His true and proper divinity, which John unfolds, in his Gospel, as the deepest meaning of the name. It testifies to the unbroken union of love between the Father and Him, and therein to the absolute perfection of our Lord's character. He is the adequate object of the eternal, divine love. As He has been from the timeless depths of old, He is, in His human life, the object of the ever-unruffled divine complacency, in whom the Father can glass Himself as in a pure mirror. It enjoins obedient listening. God's voice bids us hear Christ's voice. If He is the beloved Son, listening to Him is listening to God. This is the purpose of the whole, so far as we are concerned. We are to hear Him, when He declares God; when He witnesses of Himself, of His love, His

work, His death, His judgship; when He invites us to come to Him, and find rest; when He commands and when He promises. Amid the Babel of this day, let us listen to that voice, low and gentle, pleading and soft, authoritative, majestic, and sovereign. It will one day shake 'not the earth only, but also the heaven.' But, as yet, it calls us with strange sweetness, and the music of love in every tone. Well for us if our hearts answer, 'Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth.'

Matthew tells us that this voice from the cloud completely unmanned the disciples, who fell on their faces, and lay there, we know not how long, till Jesus came and laid a loving hand on them, bidding them arise, and not fear. So when they staggered to their feet, and looked around, they saw nothing but the grey stones of the hillside and the blue sky. 'That dread voice was past,' and the silence was broken only by the hum of insects or the twitter of a far-off bird. The strange guests have gone; the radiance has faded from the Master's face, and all is as it used to be. 'They saw no one, save Jesus only.' It is the summing up of revelation; all others vanish, He abides. It is the summing up of the world's history. Thickening folds of oblivion wrap the past, and all its mighty names become forgotten; but His figure stands out, solitary against the background of the past, as some great mountain, which travellers see long after the lower summits are sunk beneath the horizon. Let us make this the summing up of our lives. We can venture to take Him for our sole helper, pattern, love, and aim, because He, in His singleness, is enough for our hearts. There are many fragmentary precious things, but there is only one pearl of great price. And then this will be a prophecy of our deaths—a brief dark-

ness, a passing dread, and then His touch and His voice saying, 'Arise, be not afraid.' So we shall lift up our eyes, and find earth faded, and its voices fallen dim, and see 'no one any more, save Jesus only.'

THE SECRET OF POWER

'Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? 20. And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief.'—MATT. xvii. 19, 20.

'AND when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out.' That same power was bestowed, too, on the wider circle of the seventy who returned again with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name.' The ground of it was laid in the solemn words with which Christ met their wonder at their own strength, and told how He 'beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.' Therefore had they triumphed, showing the fruits of their Master's victory; and therefore had He a right to renew the gift, in the still more comprehensive promise, 'I give unto you power—over all the power of the enemy.'

What a commentary on such words this story affords! What has become of the disciples' supernatural might? Has it ebbed away as suddenly as it flowed? Is their Lord's endowment a shadow or His assurances delusion? Has He taken back what He gave? Not so. And yet His servants are ignominiously beaten. One poor devil-ridden boy brings all their resources to nothing. He stands before them writhing in the gripe of his tormentor, but they cannot set him free. The importunity of the father's prayers is vain, and the tension of expectancy in his eager face relaxes

into the old hopeless languor as he slowly droops to the conviction that 'they could not cast him out.' The malicious scorn in the eyes of the Scribes, those hostile critics who 'knew that it would be so,' helps to produce the failure which they anticipated. The curious crowd buzz about them, and in the midst of it all stand the little knot of baffled disciples, possessors of power which seems to leave them when they need it most, with the unavailing spells dying half spoken on their lips, and their faint hearts longing that their Master would come down from the mount, and cover their weakness with His own great strength.

No wonder that, as soon as Christ and they are alone, they wish to know how their mortifying defeat has come about. And they get an answer which they little expected, for the last place where men look for the explanation of their failures is within; but they will ascend into the heavens, and descend into the deeps for remote and recondite reasons, before they listen to the voice which says, 'The fault is nigh thee, in thy heart.' Christ's reply distinctly implies that the cause of their impotence lay wholly in themselves, not in any defect or withdrawal of power, but solely in that in them which grasped the power. They little expected, too, to be told that they had failed because they had not been sure they would succeed. They had thought that they believed in their ability to cast out the demon. They had tried to do so, with some kind of anticipation that they could. They had been surprised when they found that they could not. They had wonderingly asked why. And now Christ tells them that all along they had had no real faith in Him and in the reality of His gift. So subtly may unbelief steal into the heart, even while we fancy that we are

working in faith. And a further portion of our Lord's reply points them to the great means by which this conquering faith can be maintained—namely, prayer and fasting. If, then, we put all these things together, we get a series of considerations, very simple and commonplace indeed, but all the better and truer therefor, which I venture to submit to you, as having a very important bearing on all our Christian work, and especially on the missionary work of the Church. The principles which the text suggests touch the perpetual possession of the power which conquers; the condition of its victorious exercise by us, as being our faith; the subtle danger of unsuspected unbelief to which we are exposed; and the great means of preserving our faith pure and strong. I ask your attention to a few considerations on these points in their order.

But first, let me say very briefly, that I would not be understood as, by the selection of such a text, desiring to suggest that we have failed in our work. Thank God! we can point to results far, far greater than we have deserved, far greater than we have expected, however they may be beneath our desires, and still further below what the gospel was meant to accomplish. It may suit observers who have never done anything themselves, and have not particularly clear eyes for appreciating spiritual work, to talk of Christian missions as failures; but it would ill become us to assent to the lie. Failures indeed! with half a million of converts, with new forms of Christian life budding in all the wilderness of the peoples, with the consciousness of coming doom creeping about the heart of every system of idolatry! Is the green life in the hedges and in the sweet pastures starred with rathe primroses, and in the hidden copses blue with

hyacinths, a failure, because the east wind bites shrewdly, and 'the tender ash delays to clothe herself with green'? No! no, we have *not* failed. Enough has been done to vindicate the enterprise, more than enough to fill our lips with thanksgiving, enough to entitle us to say to all would-be critics—Do you the same with your enchantments. But, on the other hand, we have to confess that the success has been slow and small, chequered and interrupted, that often we have been foiled, that we have confronted many a demon whom we could not cast out, and that at home and abroad the masses of evil seem to close in around us, and we make but little impression on their serried ranks. We have had success enough to assure us that we possess the treasure, and failures enough to make us feel how weak are the earthen vessels which hold it.

And now let us turn to the principles which flow from this text.

I. We have an unvarying power.

No doubt the explanation of their defeat which most naturally suggested itself to these disciples would be that somehow or other—perhaps because of Christ's absence—they had lost the gift which they knew that they once had. And the same way of accounting for later want of success lingers among Christian people still. You will sometimes hear it said: 'God sends forth His Spirit in special fulness at special times, according to His own sovereign will; and till then we can only wait and pray.' Or, 'The miraculous powers which dwelt in the early Church have been withdrawn, and therefore the progress is slow.' The strong imaginative tendency to make an ideal perfect in the past leads us to think of the primitive age of the Church as

golden, in opposition to the plain facts of the case. We fancy that because apostles were its teachers, and the Cross within its memory, the infant society was stronger, wiser, better than any age since, and had gifts which we have lost. What had it which we do not possess? The power of working miracles. What have we which it did not possess? A completed Bible, and the experience of nineteen centuries to teach us to understand it, and to confirm by facts our confidence that Christ's gospel is for all time and every land. What have we in common with it? The same mission to fulfil, the same wants in our brethren to meet, the same gospel, the same spirit, the same immortal Lord. All that any age has possessed to fit it for the task of witnessing for Christ we too possess. The Church has in it a power which is ever adequate to the conquest of the world; and that power is constant through all time, whether we consider it as recorded in an unvarying gospel, or as energised by an abiding spirit, or as flowing from and centred in an unchangeable Lord.

We have a gospel which never can grow old. Its adaptation to the deepest needs of men's souls remains constant with these needs. These vary not from age to age. No matter what may be the superficial differences of dress, the same human heart beats beneath every robe. The great primal wants of men's spirits abide, as the great primal wants of their bodily life abide. Food and shelter for the one,—a loving, pardoning God, to know and love, for the other—else they perish. Wherever men go they carry with them a conscience which needs cleansing, a sense of separation from God joined with a dim knowledge that union with Him is life, a will which is burdened with its own selfhood,

an imagination which paints the misty walls of this earthly prison with awful shapes that terrify and faint hopes that mock, a heart that hungers for love, and a reason which pines in atrophy without light. And all these the gospel which is lodged in our hands meets. It addresses itself to nothing in men that is not in man. Surface differences of position, culture, clime, age, and the like, it brushes aside as unimportant, and it goes straight to the universal wants. People tell us it has done its work, and much confident dogmatism proclaims that the world has outgrown it. We have a right to be confident also, with a confidence born of our knowledge, that it has met and satisfied for us the wants which are ours and every man's, and to believe that as long as men live by bread, so long will this word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God be the food of their souls. Areopagus and Piccadilly, Benares and Oxford, need the same message and will find the same response to all their wants in the same word.

Many of the institutions in which Christendom has embodied its conceptions of God's truth will crumble away. Many of the conceptions will have to be modified, neglected truths will grow, to the dislocation of much systematic theology, and the Word better understood will clear away many a portentous error with which the Church has darkened the Word. Be it so. Let us be glad when 'the things which can be shaken are removed,' like mean huts built against the wall of some cathedral, masking and marring the completeness of its beauty; 'that the things which cannot be shaken may remain,' and all the clustered shafts, and deep-arched recesses, and sweet tracery may stand forth freed from the excrescences which hid them.

‘The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever.’

We have an abiding Spirit, the Giver to us of a power without variableness or the shadow of turning, ‘I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever.’ The manner of His operations may vary, but the reality of His energy abides. The ‘works’ of wonder which Jesus did on earth may no more be done, but the greater works than these are still the sign of *His* presence, without whom no spiritual life is possible. Prophecies may fail, tongues may cease, but the more excellent gifts are poured out now as richly as ever. We are apt to look back to Pentecost and think that that marked a height to which the tide has never reached since, and therefore we are stranded amidst the ooze and mud. But the river which proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb is not like one of our streams on earth, that leaps to the light and dashes rejoicingly down the hillside, but creeps along sluggish in its level course, and dies away at last in the sands. It pours along the ages the same full volume with which it gushed forth at first. Rather, the source goes with the Church in all ages, and we drink not of water that came forth long ago in the history of the world, and has reached us through the centuries, but of that which wells out fresh every moment from the Rock that follows us. The Giver of all power is with us.

We have a Lord, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. ‘Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.’ We have not merely to look back to the life and death of Christ in history, and recognise there the work, the efficacy of which shall endure for ever.

But whilst we do this, we have also to think of the Christ 'that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And the one thought, as the other, should strengthen our confidence in our possession of all the might that we need for bringing the world back to our Lord.

A work in the past which can never be exhausted or lose its power is the theme of our message. The mists of gathering ages wrap in slowly thickening folds of forgetfulness all other men and events in history, and make them ghostlike and shadowy; but no distance has yet dimmed or will ever dim that human form divine. Other names are like those stars that blaze out for a while, and then smoulder down into almost complete invisibility; but He is the very Light itself, that burns and is not consumed. Other landmarks sink below the horizon as the tribes of men pursue their solemn march through the centuries, but the Cross on Calvary 'shall stand for an ensign of the people, and to it shall the Gentiles seek.' To proclaim that accomplished salvation, once for all lodged in the heart of the world's history, and henceforth for ever valid, is our unalterable duty. The message carries in itself its own immortal strength.

A living Saviour in the present, who works with us, confirming the word with signs following, is the source of our power. Not till He is impotent shall we be weak. The unmeasurable measure of the gift of Christ defines the degree, and the unending duration of His life who continueth for ever sets the period, of our possession of the grace which is given to every one of us. He is ever bestowing. He never withdraws what He once gives. The fountain sinks not a hairsbreadth, though nineteen centuries have drawn from

it. Modern astronomy begins to believe that the sun itself by long expense of light will be shorn of its beams and wander darkling in space, circled no more by its daughter planets. But this Sun of our souls rays out for ever the energies of life and light and love, and after all communication possesses the infinite fulness of them all. 'His name shall be continued as long as the sun; all nations shall call Him blessed.'

Here then, brethren, are the perpetual elements of our constant power, an eternal Word, an abiding Spirit, an unchanging Lord.

II. The condition of exercising this power is Faith.

With such a force at our command—a force that could shake the mountains and break the rocks—how come we ever to fail? So the disciples asked, and Christ's answer cuts to the very heart of the matter. Why could you not cast him out? For one reason only, because you had lost your hold of My strength, and therefore had lost your confidence in your own derived power, or had forgotten that it was derived, and essayed to wield it as if it were your own. You did not trust Me, so you did not believe that you could cast him out; or you believed that you could by your own might, therefore you failed. He throws them back decisively on themselves as solely responsible. Nowhere else, in heaven or in earth or hell, but only in us, does the reason lie for our breakdown, if we have broken down. Not in God, who is ever with us, ready to make all grace abound in us, whose will is that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth; not in the gospel which we preach, for 'it is the power of God unto salvation'; not in the demon might which has overcome us, for 'greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.' We

are driven from all other explanations to the bitterest and yet the most hopeful of all, that we only are to blame.

And what in us is to blame? Some of us will answer—Our modes of working; they have not been free enough, or not orderly enough, or in some way or other not wisely adapted to our ends. Some will answer—Our forms of presenting the truth; they have not been flexible enough, or not fixed enough; they have been too much a reproduction of the old; they have been too licentious a departure from the old. Some will answer—Our ecclesiastical arrangements; they have been too democratic; they have been too priestly. Some will answer—Our intellectual culture; it has been too great, obscuring the simplicity that is in Christ; it has been too small, sending poorly furnished men into the field to fight with ordered systems of idolatry which rest upon a philosophical basis, and can only be overturned by undermining that. It is no part of my present duty to discuss these varying answers. No doubt there is room for improvement in all the fields which they indicate. But does not the spirit of our Lord's words here beckon us away from these purely secondary subjects to fix our self-examination on the depth and strength of our faith, as incomparably the most important element in the conditions which determine our success or our failure? I do not undervalue the worth of wise methods of action, but the history of the Church tells us that pretty nearly any methods of action are fruitful in the right hands, and that without living faith the best of them become like the heavy armour which half-smothered a feeble man. I do not pretend to that sublime indifference to dogma which is the

modern form of supreme devotion to truth, but experience has taught us that wherever the name of Christ, as the Saviour of the world, has been lovingly proclaimed, there devils have been cast out, whatever private and sectional doctrines the exorciser has added to it. I do not disparage organisation, but courage is more than drill; and there is such a thing as the very perfection of arrangement without life, like cabinets in a museum, where all the specimens are duly classified, and dead. I believe, with the old preacher, that if God does not need our learning, He needs our ignorance still less, but it is of comparatively little importance whether the draught of living water be brought to thirsty lips in an earthen cup or a golden vase.

‘The main thing is, does it hold good measure?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters.’

And therefore, while leaving full scope for all improvements in these subordinate conditions, let me urge upon you that the main thing which makes us strong for our Christian work is the grasp of living faith, which holds fast the strength of God. There is no need to plunge into the jungle of metaphysical theology here. Is it not a fact that the might with which the power of God has wrought for men’s salvation has corresponded with the strength of the Church’s desire and the purity of its trust in His power? Is it not a truth plainly spoken in Scripture and confirmed by experience, that we have the awful prerogative of limiting the Holy One of Israel, and quenching the Spirit? Was there not a time in Christ’s life on earth when He could do no mighty works because of their unbelief? We receive all spiritual gifts in proportion to our capacity, and the chief

factor in settling the measure of our capacity is our faith. Here on the one hand is the boundless ocean of the divine strength, unfathomable in its depth, full after all draughts, tideless and calm, in all its movement never troubled, in all its repose never stagnating; and on the other side is the empty aridity of our poor weak natures. Faith opens these to the influx of that great sea, and 'according to our faith,' in the exact measure of our receptivity, does it enter our hearts. In itself the gift is boundless. It has no limit except the infinite fulness of the power which worketh in us. But in reference to our possession it is bounded by our capacity, and though that capacity enlarges by the very fact of being filled, and so every moment becomes greater through fruition, yet at each moment it is the measure of our possession, and our faith is the measure of our capacity. Our power is God's power in us, and our faith is the power with which we grasp God's power and make it ours. So then, in regard to God, our faith is the condition of our being strengthened with might by His Spirit.

Consider, too, how the same faith has a natural operation on ourselves which tends to fit us for casting out the evil spirits. Given a man full of faith, you will have a man tenacious in purpose, absorbed in one grand object, simple in his motives, in whom selfishness has been driven out by the power of a mightier love, and indolence stirred into unwearied energy. Such a man will be made wise to devise, gentle to attract, bold to rebuke, fertile in expedients, and ready to be anything that may help the aim of his life. Fear will be dead in him, for faith is the true anæsthesia of the soul; and the knife may cut into the quivering flesh, and the spirit be scarce conscious of a pang.

Love, ambition, and all the swarm of distracting desires will be driven from the soul in which the lamp of faith burns bright. Ordinary human motives will appeal in vain to the ears which have heard the tones of the heavenly music, and all the pomps of life will show poor and tawdry to the sight that has gazed on the vision of the great white throne and the crystal sea. The most ignorant and erroneous 'religious sentiment'—to use a modern phrase—is mightier than all other forces in the world's history. It is like some of those terrible compounds of modern chemistry, an inert, innocuous-looking drop of liquid. Shake it, and it flames heaven high, shattering the rocks and ploughing up the soil. Put even an adulterated and carnalised faith into the hearts of a mob of wild Arabs, and in a century they will stream from their deserts, and blaze from the mountains of Spain to the plains of Bengal. Put a living faith in Christ and a heroic confidence in the power of His Gospel to reclaim the worst sinners into a man's heart, and he will out of weakness be made strong, and plough his way through obstacles with the compact force and crashing directness of lightning. There have been men of all sorts who have been honoured to do much in this world for Christ. Wise and foolish, learned and ignorant, differing in tone, temper, creed, forms of thought, and manner of working, in every conceivable degree; but one thing, and perhaps one thing only, they have all had—a passion of enthusiastic personal devotion to their Lord, a profound and living faith in Him and in His salvation. All in which they differed is but the gay gilding on the soldier's coat. That in which they were alike is as the strong arm which grasps the sword, and has its muscles braced by the very clutch.

Faith is itself a source of strength, as well as the condition of drawing might from heaven.

Consider, too, how faith has power over men who see it. The exhibition of our own personal convictions has more to do in spreading them than all the arguments which we use. There is a magnetism and a contagious energy in the sight of a brother's faith which few men can wholly resist. If you wish me to weep, your own tears must flow; and if you would have me believe, let me see your soul heaving under the emotion which you desire me to feel. The arrow may be keen and true, the shaft rounded and straight, the bow strong, and the arm sinewy; but unless the steel be winged it will fall to the ground long before it strikes the butt. Your arrows must be winged with faith, else orthodoxy, and wise arrangements, and force and zeal, will avail nothing. No man will believe in, and no demon will obey, spells which the would-be exorcist only half believes himself. Even if he speak the name of Christ, unless he speak it with unfaltering confidence, all the answer he will get will only be the fierce and taunting question, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' Brethren, let us give heed to the solemn rebuke which our Master lovingly reads to us in these words, and while we aim at the utmost possible perfection in all subordinate matters, let us remember that they all without faith are weak, as an empty suit of armour with no life beneath the corselet; and that faith without them all is strong, like the knight of old, who rode into the bloody field in simple silken vest, and conquered. That which determines our success or failure in the work of our Lord is our faith.

III. Our faith is ever threatened by subtle unbelief.

It would appear that the disciples were ignorant of the unbelief that had made them weak. They fancied that they had confidence in their Christ-given power, and they certainly had in some dull kind of fashion expected to succeed in their attempt. But He who sees the heart knew that there was no real living confidence in their souls; and His words are a solemn warning to us all, of how possible it is for us to have our faith all honeycombed by gnawing doubt while we suspect it not, like some piece of wood apparently sound, the whole substance of which has been eaten away by hidden worms. We may be going on with Christian work, and may even be looking for spiritual results. We may fancy ourselves faithful stewards of the gospel, and all the while there may be an utter absence of the one thing which makes our words more than so much wind whistling through an archway. The shorn Samson went out 'to shake himself as at other times,' and knew not that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. Who among us is not exposed to the assaults of that pestilence that walketh in darkness? and, alas! who among us can say that he has repelled the contagion? Subtly it creeps over us all, the stealthy intangible vapour, unfelt till it has quenched the lamp which alone lights the darkness of the mine, and clogged to suffocation the labouring lungs.

I will not now speak of the general sources of danger to our faith, which are always in operation with a retarding force as constant as friction, as certain as the gravitation which pulls the pendulum to rest at its lowest point. But I may very briefly particularise two of the enemies of that faith, which have a special bearing on our missionary work, and may be illustrated from the narrative before us.

First, all our activity in spreading the Gospel, whether by personal effort or by our gifts, like every form of outward action, tends to become mechanical, and to lose its connection with the motive which originated it. Of course it is also true, on the other side, that all outward action also tends to strengthen the motive from which it flows. But our Christian work will not do so, unless it be carefully watched, and pains be taken to keep it from slipping off its original foundation, and so altering its whole character. We may very easily become so occupied with the mere external occupation as to be quite unconscious that it has ceased to be faithful work, and has become routine, dull mechanism, or the result of confidence, not in Christ, whose power once flowed through us, but in ourselves the doers. So these disciples may have thought, 'We can cast out this devil, for we have done the like already,' and have forgotten that it was not they, but Christ in them, who had done it.

How widely this foe to our faith operates amid the multiplied activities of this busy age, one trembles to think. We see all around us a Church toiling with unexampled expenditure of wealth, and effort, and time. It is difficult to repress the suspicion that the work is out of proportion to the life. Ah, brethren, how much of all this energy of effort, so admirable in many respects, will He whose fan is in His hand accept as true service—how much of it will be wheat for the garner, how much chaff for the fire? It is not for us to divide between the two, but it is for us to remember that it is not impossible to make of our labours the most dangerous enemy to the depth of our still life hidden with Christ in God, and that every deed of apparent service which is not the real

issue of living faith is powerless for good to others, and heavy with hurt to ourselves. Brethren and fathers in the ministry! how many of us know what it is to talk and toil away our early devotion; and all at once to discover that for years perhaps we have been preaching and labouring from mere habit and routine, like corpses galvanised into some ghastly and transient caricature of life. Christian men and women, beware lest this great enterprise of missions, which our fathers began from the holiest motives and in the simplest faith, should in our hand be wrenched away from its only true basis, and be done with languid expectation and more languid desires of success, from no higher motive than that we found it in existence, and have become accustomed to carry it on. If that be our reason, then we harm ourselves, and mask from our own sight our own unbelief. If that be the case the work may go on for a while, like a clock ticking with fainter and fainter beats for a minute after it has run down; but it will soon cease, and neither heaven nor earth will be much the poorer for its ending.

Again, the atmosphere of scornful disbelief which surrounded the disciples made their faith falter. It was too weak to sustain itself in the face of the consciousness that not a man in all that crowd believed in their power; and it melted away before the contempt of the scribes and the incredulous curiosity of the bystanders, without any reason except the subtle influence which the opinions and characters of those around us have on us all.

And, brethren, are not we in danger to-day of losing the firmness of our grasp on Christ, as our Saviour and the world's, from a precisely similar cause? We

live in an atmosphere of hesitancy and doubt, of scornful rejection of His claims, of contemptuous disbelief in anything which a scalpel cannot cut. We cannot but be conscious that to hold by Jesus Christ as the Incarnate God, the supernatural Beginning of a new life, the sole Hope of the world, is to expose ourselves to the contempt of so-called advanced and liberal thinkers, and to be out of harmony with the prevailing set of opinions. The current of educated thought runs strongly against such beliefs, and I suppose that every thoughtful man among us feels that a great danger to our faith to-day comes from the force with which that current swings us round, and threatens to make some of us drag our anchors, and drift, and strike and go to pieces on the sands. For one man who is led by the sheer force of reason to yield to the intellectual grounds on which modern unbelief reposes, there are twenty who simply catch the infection in the atmosphere. They find that their early convictions have evaporated, they know not how; only that once the fleece was wet with dew and now it is dry. For unbelief has a contagious energy wholly independent of reason, no less than has faith, and affects multitudes who know nothing of its grounds, as the iceberg chills the summer air for leagues, and makes the sailors shiver long before they see its barren peaks.

Therefore, brethren, let us all take heed to ourselves, lest we suffer our grasp of our dear Lord's hand to relax for no better reason than because so many have left His side. To us all His pleading love, which knows how much we are moulded by the example of others, is saying, in view of the fashion of unbelief, 'Will ye also go away?' Let us answer, with a clasp that clings the tighter for our danger of being sucked in

by the strong current, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' We cannot help seeing that the creeping paralysis of hesitancy and doubt about even the power of Christ's name is stealing over portions of the Church, and stiffening the arm of its activity. Lips that once spoke with full confidence the words that cast out devils, mutter them now languidly with half-belief. Hearts that were once full of sympathy with the great purpose for which Christ died are growing cold to the work of preaching the Gospel to the heathen, because they are growing to doubt whether, after all, there is any Gospel at all. This icy breath, dear brethren, is blowing over our Churches and over our hearts. And wherever it reaches, there labour for Jesus and for men languishes, and we recoil baffled with unavailing exorcisms dying in our throats, and the rod of our power broken in our hands. 'Why could not we cast him out? Because of your unbelief.'

IV. Our faith can only be maintained by constant devotion and rigid self-denial.

I can touch but very lightly on that solemn thought in which our Lord sets forth the condition of our faith, and therefore of our power. This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. The discipline then which nurtures faith is mainly moral and spiritual—not as a substitute for, or to the exclusion of, the intellectual discipline, which is presupposed, not neglected, in these words.

The first condition of the freshness and energy of faith is constant devotion. The attrition of the world wears it thin, the distractions of life draw it from its clinging hold on Christ, the very toil for Him is apt to entice our thoughts from out of the secret place of the

most High into the busy arena of our strife. Therefore we have ever need to refresh the drooping flowers of the chaplet by bathing them in the Fountain of Life, to rise above all the fevered toil of earth to the calm heights where God dwells, and in still communion with Him to replenish our emptied vessels and fill our dimly burning lamps with His golden oil. The sister of the cumbered Martha is the contemplative Mary, who sits in silence at the Master's feet and lets His words sink into her soul: the closest friend of Peter the apostle of action is John the apostle of love. If our work is to be worthy, it must ever be freshened anew by our gaze into His face; if our communion with Him is to be deep, it must never be parted from outward service. Our Master has left us the example, in that, when the night fell and every man went to his own home, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives; and thence, after His night of prayer, came very early in the morning to the temple, and taught. The stream that is to flow broad and life-giving through many lands must have its hidden source high among the pure snows that cap the mount of God. The man that would work for God must live with God. It was from the height of transfiguration that *He* came, before whom the demon that baffled the disciples quailed and slunk away like a whipped hound. This kind goeth not out but by prayer.

The second condition is rigid self-denial. Fasting is the expression of the purpose to control the lower life, and to abstain from its delights in order that the life of the spirit may be strengthened. As to the outward fact, it is nothing—it may be practised or not. If it be, it will be valuable only in so far as it flows from and strengthens that purpose. And such vigorous subordi-

nation of all the lower powers, and abstinence from many an inferior good, both material and immaterial, is absolutely necessary if we are to have any wholesome strength of faith in our souls. In the recoil from the false asceticism of Roman Catholicism and Puritanism, has not this generation of the Church gone too far in the opposite direction? and in the true belief that Christianity can sanctify all joys, and ensure the harmonious development of all our powers, have we not been forgetting that hand and foot may cause us to stumble, and that we had better live maimed than die with all our limbs? There is a true asceticism, a discipline—a ‘gymnastic unto godliness,’ as Paul calls it. And if our faith is to grow high and bear rich clusters on the topmost boughs that look up to the sky, we must keep the wild lower shoots close nipped. Without rigid self-control and self-limitation, no vigorous faith.

And without them no effectual work! It is no holiday task to cast out devils. Self-indulgent men will never do it. Loose-braced, easy souls, that lie open to all the pleasurable influences of ordinary life, are no more fit for God’s weapons than a reed for a lance, or a bit of flexible lead for a spear-point. The wood must be tough and compact, the metal hard and close-grained, out of which God makes His shafts. The brand that is to guide men through the darkness to their Father’s home must glow with a pallor of consuming flame that purges its whole substance into light. This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

Dear brethren, what solemn rebuke these words have for us all! How they winnow our works of Christian activity! How they show us the hollow-

ness of our services, the self-indulgence of our lives, the coldness of our devotion, the cowardice of our faith! How marvellous they make the fruits which God's great goodness has permitted us to see even from our doubting service! Let us turn to Him with fresh thankfulness that unto us, who are 'less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that we should preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ.' Let us not be driven from our confidence that we have a gospel to preach for all the world; but strong in the faith which rests on impregnable historical grounds, on our own experience of what Christ has done for us, and on nineteen centuries of growing power and unfolding wisdom, let us thankfully welcome all that modern thought may supply for the correction of errors in belief, in organisation, and in life, that may have gathered round His perfect and eternal gospel—being assured, as we have a right to be, that all will but lift higher the Name which is above every name, and set forth more plainly that Cross which is the true tree of life to all the families of men. Let us cast ourselves before Him with penitent confession, and say,—O Lord, our strength! we have not wrought any deliverance on earth; we have been weak when all Thy power was at our command; we have spoken Thy word as if it were an experiment and a peradventure whether it had might; we have let go Thy hand and lost Thy garment's hem from our slack grasp; we have been prayerless and self-indulgent. Therefore Thou hast put us to shame before our foes, and 'our enemies laugh among themselves. Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth; stir up Thy strength and come and save us!' Then will the last words that He

spoke on earth ring out again from the throne: 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'

THE COIN IN THE FISH'S MOUTH

'And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? 26. Peter saith unto Him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.'—MATT. xvii. 25, 26.

ALL our Lord's miracles are 'signs' as well as 'wonders.' They have a meaning. They not only authenticate His teaching, but they are themselves no inconsiderable portion of the teaching. They are not only 'the great bell before His sermon,' but they are also a portion of the sermon.

That doctrinal or dogmatic purpose characterises all the miracles in varying degrees. It is the only purpose of the one before us. This singular miracle of finding the coin in the fish's mouth and giving it for the tribute-money is unlike our Lord's other works in several particulars. It is the only miracle—with the exception of the cursing of the barren fig-tree, and the episode of the unclean spirits entering into the swine—in which there is no message of love or blessing for man's sorrow and pain. It is the only miracle in which our Lord uses His power for His own service or help, and it is like the whole brood of legendary miracles, and unlike all the rest of Christ's in that, at first sight, it seems done for a very trivial end—the providing of some three shillings of our money.

Now, if we put all these things together, the absence

of any alleviation of man's sorrow, the presence of a personal end, and the apparent triviality of the result secured, I think we shall see that the only explanation of the miracle is given by regarding it as being what I may call a teaching one, full of instruction with regard to our Lord's character, person, and work. It is a parable as well as a miracle, and it is in that aspect that I wish to look at it now, and try to bring out its lessons.

I. We have here, first, the freedom of the Son.

The whole point of the story depends upon the fact that this tribute-money was not a civil, but an ecclesiastical impost. It had originally been levied in the Wilderness, at the time of the numbering of the people, and was enjoined to be repeated at each census, when every male Israelite was to pay half a shekel for 'a ransom for his soul,' an acknowledgment that his life was forfeited by sin. In later years it came to be levied as an annual payment for the support of the temple and its ceremonial. It was never compulsory, there was no power to exact it. The question of the collectors, 'Doth not your Master pay tribute?' does not sound like the imperative demand which a 'publican' would have made for payment of an impost due to the Roman Government. It was an 'optional church-rate,' and the very fact that it was so, would make Jews who were, or wished to be considered, patriotic or religious, the more punctilious in paying it.

The question put to Peter possibly implies a doubt whether this Rabbi, who held lax views on so many points of Pharisaical righteousness, would be likely to recognise the obligation of the tax. Peter's quick answer seems to be prompted by zeal for his Master's

honour, on which the question appears to him to cast a slur. It was perhaps too quick, but the apostle has been too much blamed for his answer, which was in fact correct, and for which our Lord does not blame him. When he comes to Christ to tell what has happened, before he can speak, Christ puts to him this little parable which I have taken as part of my text: 'How thinkest thou? Do kings of this world take custom?'—meaning thereby not imports or exports, but taxes of all kinds of things,—'or tribute,'—meaning thereby taxes on persons—'from their own children, or from subjects who are not their children?' The answer, of course, is, 'From the latter.' So the answer comes, 'Then are the children free.'

Christ then here claims in some sense, Sonship to Him to whom the tribute is paid, that is, to God, and therefore freedom from the obligation to pay the tribute. But notice, for this is an important point in the explanation of the words, that the plural in our Lord's words, 'Then are the children free,' is not intended to include Peter and the others in the same category as Himself. The only question in hand is as to His obligation to pay a certain tax; and to include any one else would have been irrelevant, as well as erroneous. The plural belongs to the illustration, not to its application, and corresponds with the plural in the question, 'Of whom do the *kings* of the earth take custom?' The kings of the earth are contrasted with the one King of the heavens, the supreme and sole Sovereign; and the children of the kings of the earth are contrasted with the only begotten Son of the only King of kings and Lord of lords.

So that here there is no mixing up of Himself with

others, or of others with Himself, but the claiming of an unique position, singular and sole, belonging to Him only, in which He stands as the Son of the mighty Monarch to whom the tribute is paid. He claims to have the divine nature, the divine prerogatives, to bear a specific relationship to God Himself, and to be, as other words in Scripture put it, 'the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person.'

If there is anything certain about Jesus Christ's teaching, this is certain about it, that He proclaimed Himself to be the Son of God, in such a sense as no man shared with Him, and in such a sense as vindicated the attitude which He took up, the demands which He made, and the gifts which He offered to men.

What a deduction must be made from the wisdom of His teaching, and from the meekness of His Spirit, if that claim was an illusion! What shall we say of the sanity of a man who poses himself before the whole race, claiming to be the Son of God, and whose continual teaching to them therefore is, *not*, 'Believe in goodness'; 'Believe in virtue'; 'Believe in truth'; 'Believe in My word'; but 'Believe in Me'? Was there ever anywhere else a religious teacher, all of whose words were gracious and wise and sweet, but who—

'Make the important stumble,
Of saying that he, the sage and humble,
Was likewise—one with the Creator'?

But now what is the freedom based on sonship which our Lord here claims?

I have said that this tax was levied with a double meaning; first, it was an atonement or ransom for the soul; second, it was devoted to the temple and

its worship. And now, mark, that in both these aspects our Lord alleges His true sonship as the reason why He is exempt from it.

That is to say, first, Jesus Christ claims to have no need of a ransom for His soul. Never one word dropped from His lips which indicated the smallest consciousness of flaw or failure, of defect or imperfection, still less of actual transgression. He takes His position outside the circle of sinful men which includes all others. It is a strange characteristic in a religious teacher, very unlike the usual tone of devout men. And stranger still is the fact that the absence of this consciousness of evil has never been felt to be itself evil and a blot. Think of a David's agony of penitence. Think of a Paul's, 'Of whom I am chief!' Think of the long wail of an Augustine's confessions. Think of the stormy self-accusations of a Luther; and then think that He who inspired them all, never, by word or deed, betrayed the slightest consciousness that in Himself there was the smallest deflection from the perfect line of right, the least speck or stain on the perfect gold of His purity. And remember, too, that when He challenges the world with, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' with the exception of half a dozen men, of whom we can scarcely say whether their want of spiritual insight or their arrogance of self-importance is the most flagrant, who, in the course of nineteen centuries, have ventured to fling their little handfuls of mud at Him, the whole world has answered, 'Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into Thy lips.'

The Son needs no 'ransom for His soul,' which, being translated, is but this: the purity and the inno-

cence of Jesus Christ, which is a manifest fact in His biography, is only explicable when we believe that we have before us the Incarnate God, and therefore the Perfect Man. And the Son needs no temple for His worship. His whole life, as human, was a life of communion and prayer with His Father in heaven. And just because He 'dwelt in' God's 'bosom all the year,' for Him ritual and temple were nought. Sense-bound men needed them; He needed them not. 'In this place,' said He, 'is one greater than the temple.' He was all which the temple symbolised. Was it the dwelling-place of God, the place of sacrifice, the meeting-place of man with God, the place of divine manifestation? 'The temple of His body' was in deepest reality all these. In it dwelt the whole fulness of the Godhead. It was at once sacrifice and place of sacrifice, even as He is the true everlasting Priest. In Him men see God, and meet with God. He is greater than the temple because He is the true temple, and He is the true temple because He is the Son. And because He is the Son, therefore He is free from all dependence upon, and connection with, the outward worship of ceremony and sacrifice and priest and ritual.

Now, dear brethren, let me pause for one moment to press upon you and upon myself this question: Do I welcome that Christ with the full conviction that He is the Son of God? It seems to me that, in this generation, the question of questions, as far as religion is concerned, is the old one which Christ asked of His disciples by the fountains and woods of Cæsarea Philippi: 'Whom say ye that I, the Son of Man, am?' Can you lift up your face to meet His clear and all-searching eye, and say: 'Thou art the Christ, the

Son of the living God'? If you can, you are on the way to understanding Him and His work; if you cannot, His life and work are all wrapped in darkness for you, His death robbed of its truest power, and your life deprived of its surest anchor.

II. Now, there is a second lesson that I would gather from this miracle—the voluntary submission of the Son to the bonds from which He is free.

He bids His disciple pay the tribute for Him, for a specific reason: 'Lest we should offend them.' That, of course, is simply a piece of practical wisdom, to prevent any narrow or purblind souls from stumbling at His teaching, by reason of His neglect of this trivial matter. The question of how far religious teachers or any others are at liberty, when they are not actuated by personal motives, to render compliance with ceremonies which are of no value to them, is a wide one, which I have no need to dwell upon here. But, turning from that specific aspect of the incident, I think we may look upon it as being an illustration, in regard to a very small matter, of what is really the essence of our Lord's relation to the whole world and ourselves—His voluntary taking upon Himself of bonds from which He is free.

Is it not a symbol of the very heart of the meaning of His Incarnation? 'For as much as the children are partakers of flesh and blood He also Himself likewise takes part of the same.' 'He is found in fashion as a man.' He chooses to enter within the limits and the obligations of humanity. Round the radiant glories of the divinity, He gathers the folds of the veil of human flesh. He immerses the pillar of fire in a cloud of smoke. He comes amongst us, taking on His own wrists the fetters that bind us, suffering Himself to

be 'cribbed, cabined, and confined' within the narrow limits of our manhood, in order that by His voluntary acceptance of it we may be redeemed from our corruption.

Is it not a parable of His life and lowly obedience? He proclaimed the same principle as the guide for all His conduct, when, sinless, He presented Himself to John for the 'baptism of repentance,' and overcame the baptiser's scruples with the words, 'Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' He comes under the law. Bound to no such service, He binds Himself to all human duties that He may hallow the bonds which He has worn, may set us the pattern of perfect obedience, and may know a servant's heart.

The Prince is free, but King's Son though He be, He goes among His Father's poor subjects, lives their squalid lives, makes experience of their poverty, and hardens His hands by labouring like them. Sympathy He 'learned in huts where poor men lie.'

Is it not the rehearsal in parable of His death? He was free from the bonds of mortality, and He took upon Him our human flesh. He was free from the necessity of death, even after He had taken our flesh upon Him. But, being free from the necessity, He submitted to the actuality, and laid down His life of Himself, because of His loving will, to save and help each of us. Oh, dear friends! we never can understand the meaning and the beauty, either of the life or of the death of our Master, unless we look at each from this point of view, that it is His willing acceptance of the bonds that bind us. His own loving will brought Him here; His own loving will kept Him here; His own loving will impelled Him along the path of life, though at every step of it He trod as

with naked feet upon burning iron; His own loving will brought Him to the Cross; His own loving will, and not the Roman soldiers' nails, fastened Him to it. Let us look, then, to Him with thankfulness, and recognise in that death His thorough identification with all the bonds and miseries of our condition. He 'took part of the same that through death He might deliver them that by fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.'

III. Then there is another lesson which I think we may fairly gather from this miracle, viz. that we have here the supernatural glory which ever accompanies the humiliation of the Son.

The miracle, at first sight, appears to be for a very trivial end. Men have made merry with it by reason of that very triviality. But the miracle is vindicated, peculiar as it is, by a deep divine congruity and decorum. He will submit, Son though He be, to this complete identification of Himself with us. But He will so submit as, even in submitting, to assert His divine dignity. As has been well said, 'In the midst of the act of submission majesty flashes forth.' A multiform miracle—containing many miracles in one—a miracle of omniscience, and a miracle of influence over the lower creatures is wrought. The first fish that rises carries in its mouth the exact sum needed.

Here, therefore, we have another illustration of that remarkable blending of humiliation and glory, which is a characteristic of our Lord's life. These two strands are always twined together, like a twisted line of gold and black. At each moment of special abasement there is some special coruscation of the brightness of His glory. Whensoever He stoops there is something accompanying the stooping, to tell how great and how

merciful He is who bows. Out of the deepest darkness there flashes some light. So at His cradle, which seems to be the identifying of Him with humanity in its most helpless and lowest condition, there shall be angels, and the stars in their courses shall bow and move to guide wise men from afar with offerings to His feet. And at His Cross, where He sounds the very bass string and touches the lowest point of humiliation and defeat, a clearer vision sees in that humiliation the highest glory.

And thus, here, He will not only identify Himself with sinful men who need a ransom, and with sense-bound men who need a sacrifice and a temple, but He will so identify Himself with them as that He shall send His power into the recesses of the lake, where His knowledge sees, as clearly as our eyes see the men that stand beside us, and obedient to an unconscious impulse from Him, the dumb creature that had swallowed, as it sunk, the shining *stater* that had dropped out of the girdle of some fisherman, shall rise first to the hook; in token that not only in His Father's house does He rule as a Son over His own house, but that He 'doeth as He hath pleased, in all deep places,' and that in Him the ancient hope is fulfilled of a Son of Man who 'hath dominion over the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.' The miracle was for a trivial end in appearance, but it was a demonstration, though to one man only at first, yet through him to all the world, that this Christ, in His lowliness, is the Everlasting Son of the Father.

IV. And so, lastly, we have here also the lesson of the sufficiency for us all of what He provides.

'That take, and give unto them for Me and for thee.

He does not say '*For us.*' He and Peter do not stand on the same level. He has chosen to submit Himself to the obligations, Peter was necessarily under them. That which is found by miracle in the fish's mouth is precisely the amount required for both the one and the other. It is rendered, as the original has it, '*Instead of thee and Me,*' putting emphasis upon the characteristic of the tribute as being ransom, or payment, for a man's soul.

And so, although this thought is not part of the original purpose of the miracle, and, therefore, is different from those which I have already been dwelling on, which are part of that purpose, I think we may fairly see here this great truth,—that that which Christ brings to us by supernatural act, far greater than the miracle here, is enough for all the claims and obligations that God, or man, or law, or conscience have upon any of us. His perfect obedience and stainless life discharged for Himself all the obligations to law and righteousness under which He came as a Man; His perfect life and His mighty death are for us the full discharge of all that can be brought against us.

There are many and solemn claims and claimants upon each of us. Law and duty, that awful '*ought*' which should rule our lives and which we have broken thousands of times, come to each of us in many an hour of clear vision, and take us by the throat, and say, '*Pay us what thou owest!*' And there is a Judgment Day before all of us; which is no mere bugbear to frighten children, but will be a fact of experience in our case. Friend! how are you going to meet your obligations? You owe God all your love, all your heart, will, strength, service. What an awful

score of unpaid debts, with accumulated interest, there stands against each of our names! Think of some bankrupt sitting in his counting-house with a balance-sheet before him that shows his hopeless insolvency. He sits and broods, and broods, and does not know what in the world he is going to do. The door opens—a messenger enters and gives him an envelope. He tears it open, and there flutters out a cheque that more than pays it all. The illustration is a very low one; it does not cover the whole ground of Christ's work for you. It puts a possibly commercial aspect into it, which we have to take care of lest it become the exclusive one; but it is true for all that. You are the bankrupt. What have you to pay? Oh, behold that precious treasure of gold tried in the fire, which is Christ's righteousness and Christ's death; and by faith in Him, '*that take and give*' and all the debt will be discharged, and you will be set free and made a son by that Son who has taken upon Himself all our bonds, and so has broken them; who has taken upon Himself all our debts, and so has cancelled them every one.

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